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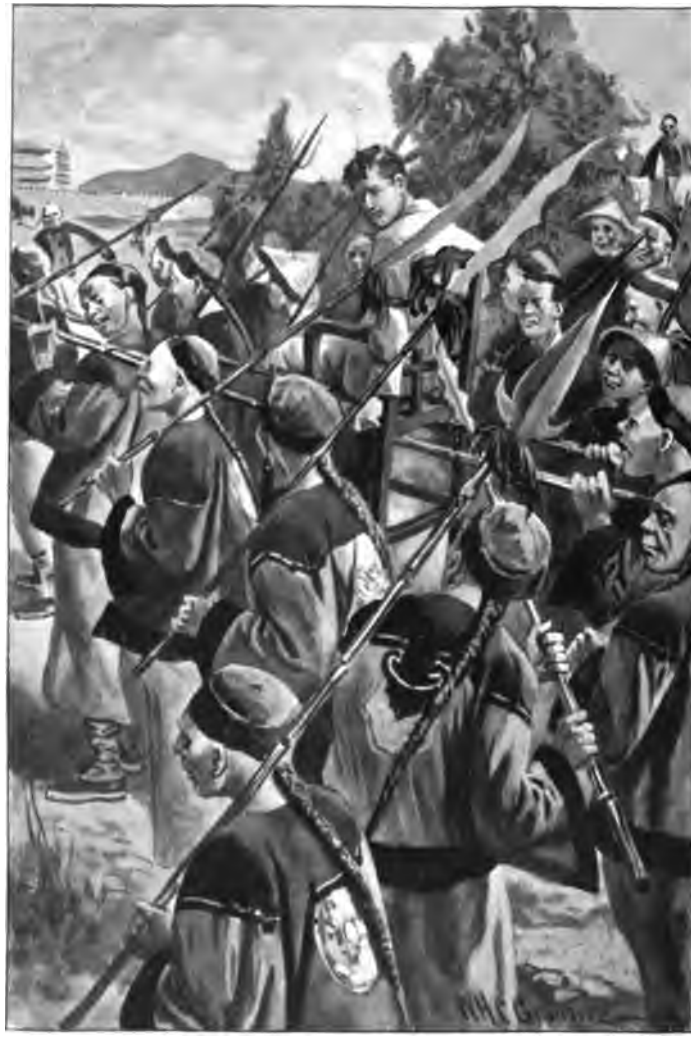

Gave the young prisoner a prog with it in the back.

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A BOY'S
ADVENTURES IN
CHINA

1.50

BY

GEORGE MANVILLE FENN

AUTHOR OF

'THE KOPJE GARRISON,' 'CHARGE,' 'FIX BAYONETS,'
'DRAW SWORDS,' 'VINCE THE REBEL,'
'THE BLACK TOR,' ETC.

EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS
BY
W. H. C. GROOME

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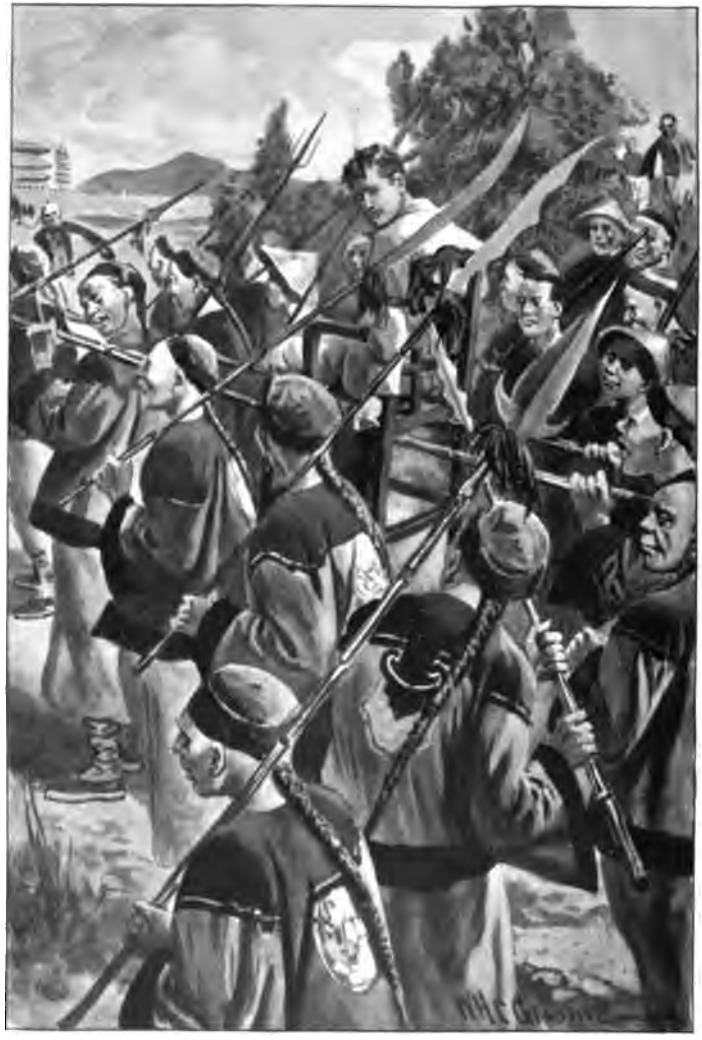

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STAN LYNN;

A BOY'S ADVENTURES IN CHINA.

CHAPTER I.

'CAN YOU USE A SWORD?'

'YES! What is it?'

'Hist, boy! Jump up and dress.'

'Oh, it's you, father!' said the newly aroused sleeper, slipping out of bed—or, rather, off his bed, for the heat of an Eastern China night had made him dispense with bedclothes.

He made a frantic dash at his trousers, feeling confused and strange in the darkness, and hardly knowing whether he was dreaming or awake, as he whispered:

'Is anything the matter?'

There was no reply, and the lad became conscious of the fact that his father had passed out of the room after awakening him.

Dressing in the darkness is not pleasant. Buttons have a habit of making for the wrong holes, socks

and collars and ties of slipping off the bedside chair and hiding underneath anywhere; while if it is very dark, elbows come in contact with pieces of furniture, and the back of the hair-brush is liable to come rap against the skull, instead of the yielding, bristly front.

Stanley Lynn went through divers experiences of this kind as he hurried on his clothes, wondering what was the matter the while, and coming to the conclusion that Uncle Jeff must have been taken ill and wanted the doctor.

The lad had just come to this decision when a faint click told him that the door had been reopened —proof of which came in the shape of a whisper:

'Dressed, boy?'

'Yes, father. Is Uncle Jeff ill?'

'Ill? No, my boy. But be very quiet; they don't know that we are stirring.'

'Who don't, father?'

'Bah! Don't ask questions, boy,' said his father in an impatient whisper. 'There, there! of course you want to know. Here, Stan, can you fight?'

'A little, father,' said the boy in a tone full of surprise. 'I had two or three sets-to at school.'

'Pooh! Absurd! Look here, boy; your uncle Jeff was alarmed by sounds down by the warehouse entry, and looking out cautiously, he saw men at work by the big doors.'

'Robbers, father?' said the boy excitedly.

'Yes, robbers—river pirates.'

'And you want me to go for the police?'

'No, boy; I want you to help us to keep the wretches at bay. We shall be only three with you,

and we can't afford to reduce our numbers to two. Can you load and fire a pistol?'

'Yes, father; Tom Dicks and I used to go rabbit-shooting with one'——

'Then you ought to be able to hit a man if you can shoot rabbits.'

The thought flashed across the boy's brain that, though he and his fellow-pupil had gone shooting on the Clovelly cliffs times enough, they had never once hit a rabbit; but there was no time to communicate this fact to his father. 'And besides,' he thought, 'I dare say firing the pistol will be enough; the noise will frighten the men away.'

'Can you use a sword, Stan?'

'Yes, father. You know I had fencing lessons.'

'Bah!' muttered his elder impatiently. 'Poking about a square skewer with a leather-covered button at the end! I mean a service sword—cut and thrust. There! you must try. Catch hold and come along. Loaded, mind.'

The last words were uttered as the boy felt the butt of a revolver thrust into one hand, the handle of a sword into the other.

'Tread softly, boy,' whispered his father. 'This way.'

Stanley Lynn felt more confused than ever, for he had only returned from England two days before, after six years' absence and work at a big school; and the home he had now come to in Hai-Hai was a very much larger and more important place than that he had quitted at Canton years before. Everything had seemed strange, even by day, in the big, roomy, lightly built place con-

nected with the great warehouse and wharf, while the lower part of the former building was used as offices and sampling-rooms. He had not half mastered the intricacies of the place by the previous evening, while now in the darkness—woke up from a deep sleep—everything seemed puzzling in the extreme.

'Got him?' said a familiar voice out of the darkness.

'Yes.'

'That's right. Don't be alarmed, Stan. The rascals are breaking into the office, but I think if we keep up a little revolver-shooting they'll soon go back to their boats.'

'Eh?' cried Stanley's father. 'Then they came in boats?'

'I've not seen them; but of course they came in boats. Hist!'

There was no need for the warning, for all held their breath and listened to a low, scratching, tearing noise suggestive of some tool being used to break open a door.

'They're at the big side-entry,' said Stanley's father.

'No; it's the little office door, I'm sure,' said the gentleman whom Stanley's father addressed as Jeff. 'Now then, what shall we do? Go down and fire through the door, or give them a dose out of one of these windows?'

'It all comes of building a place so far from help,' said Stanley's father, ignoring his brother's question.

'Don't grumble, man,' was the reply. 'Why, in another year we shall be quite shut in.'

'Will that save us now?' said Stanley's father bitterly.

'No, Noll, old fellow,' said his brother cheerfully. 'We shall have to save ourselves this time—independently.—Like fighting, Stan?' he continued, turning to the boy.

'No, uncle; hate it,' said the lad laconically.

'Ha! I dare say this is not the only time you will be called upon to do things you don't like.—Now, now, what is it to be—downstairs, and a few shots through the panels?'

'I suppose so.—Take care, Stan; they are savage beasts to deal with.'

'Yes, the brutes!' said Uncle Jeff; 'but he need not expose himself. We'll do the work if he hands us the tools.'

'That I shan't!' muttered the boy, gripping sword and pistol tightly. 'Father doesn't wish me to do that.'

'Come along,' said Uncle Jeff. 'Shall I lead, Noll?'

'Yes; go on.—Take care how you come, Stan. And mind this, boy: if the enemy do begin to fire, throw yourself flat on your face at once.'

'Yes, father,' was the reply; and the next minute, as Stan judged, they were standing in a wide passage, listening to the scraping, tearing noise, which sounded dull and smothered, till all at once, after a faint rustling which indicated that Uncle Jeff had unlocked, unbarred, unbolted, and thrown open a door, the cracking and tearing sounded quite loud.

'Bless 'em!' whispered Uncle Jeff, 'they mean silk. Never mind; we'll give them lead instead. Be ready! Silence! They don't know we're here.'

As he spoke Uncle Jeff moved towards the spot

from which the noise came, and Stan felt his arm grasped above the elbow by his father and guided in one particular direction till he touched his uncle in the dark.

In the brief moments which ensued, Stan, now fully awake not only to what was going on but to the danger of his position, seemed to see a group of rough-looking, semi-savage Chinese—with whose stolid, half-cunning, half-treacherous countenances he had become acquainted during his short sojourn in port—standing just outside the office door, looking on while three or four were plying crowbars and trying to prise open the stout door, which seemed to be bravely resisting their efforts, till all at once there was a sharp crack and the falling inside of a piece of wood.

As the wood fell with a soft, clattering sound all became silent, the attacking party evidently listening for the occupants of the house to raise an alarm, or at all events to make some sign.

But no one inside stirred until, after quite ten minutes—which seemed to Stan like sixty—the cracking and breaking of wood was heard again.

Then Uncle Jeff turned to his brother and whispered:

'Hold your hand. I'll try what a shot by way of warning will do. If we fire and wound the wretches they will be furious, and we are very weak.'

Stanley's father whispered back two words which did not in the least accord with the position of the listeners, for he said:

'Very well.'

The next moment Stan saw a bright flash of

light cut the darkness, showing by its diagonal direction that the pistol had been fired towards the ceiling.

The report sounded loud, and was followed once more by perfect silence.

The lad's heart gave a leap, and a feeling of profound relief and satisfaction came over him.

'Frightened them away!' he said to himself; and the horrible thoughts which had attacked him like a nightmare, of the atrocities of which the marauding Chinese were reported to have been guilty, were dying slowly away, when the lad's spirits sank again to zero, and he felt as cold, for all at once a savage burst of yells arose, followed by a fierce attack upon the door. All attempt at concealment was now at an end, and the attempt became perfectly open.

'Won't this bring help, father?' said Stan in a voice that sounded rather choking.

'No,' said Uncle Jeff shortly. 'People will think it is some Chinese row, and by the time the right sort of help comes it will be too late if we don't take care.—Now then, Oliver, it means business. We must hold the place till help does come. Make ready, and let's give them three shots through the door. I don't suppose it will do any harm to them, but it may scare them off. Now then!—You will fire too, Stan?'

'Yes, uncle.'

'Quick, then! Aim straight at the spot where the noise is loudest. Ready!—Fire!'

Three revolver-shots sounded almost like one, and this was followed by a low, fierce snarl. The beating and breaking of the woodwork ceased, and there

was an angry, passionate cry, with a deep, hurried growling as of many voices.

'Some one hit,' said Stanley's father.

'And serve the wretch right!' cried Uncle Jeff fiercely. 'Come, Oliver, old fellow, it is no time for being squeamish; it 's our lives or theirs.'

'Yes,' said Stanley's father firmly. 'Forgive me if I had a few minutes' hesitation. We must fight, Jeff, and do our best. Help must come at last.'

'But can't I go and fetch help, father—uncle?'

'No, boy—no,' said his uncle impatiently. 'Do you want to be hacked to pieces?'

'No, uncle. They wouldn't see me in the dark.'

'Perhaps not, boy, but they 'd feel you. There are dozens of them, and you may rest assured that they have surrounded the place. Help must come from without. All we can do is to hold out and fight as savagely as they do.'

'Hush! what 's that?' said Stanley's father sharply.

'I can hear it: hammering somewhere at the back,' said Stanley excitedly.

'It 's what I expected,' said his uncle. 'They are trying to break in there. Let 's give them a couple of rounds, and then get out of here and barricade the door.'

'I don't like giving up till they force a way in,' said Stanley's father; and the lad felt that he was right, until his uncle spoke.

'Are we fit to meet such an onslaught as they will make?' he said angrily. 'They 'll rush in with spear and sword—you know their reckless way. We should be overpowered at once. Come, Oliver, leave all to me. Firing is our only chance.'

'Yes,' said Stanley's father. 'Give the word.'

It was given, and another little volley was delivered, filling the office with light for a moment, and the dense, dank smell of burnt gunpowder for long enough.

This volley did more mischief, for much of the woodwork of the panels had been cut away; but the result was only to enrage the attacking party more and more, making them hack furiously at the door, and with such effect that the proximity of the sounds indicated that it could not be long before it was broken right away.

'Be ready for the retreat,' said Uncle Jeff. 'Can you find your way, Stan?'

'Yes, uncle.'

'Then, when I give the word, pass through first and stand aside while I bolt and bar the inner door. —Ah! it's time to move. Now then, fire, and then dash through into the lobby.'

It was none too soon, for all at once, after a thundering crack or two, the remains of the door gave way. The marauders rushed in with a yell, but to be met with another little volley; and as they came on, yelling savagely, and making a rush for the position occupied by the defenders, as indicated by the flashes of the revolvers, yet another volley was fired, checking them for the moment, and giving Uncle Jeff time to slam the inner door in their faces, and to lock and bolt it rapidly in the black darkness.

'There!' he said; 'that will take them some time to get through, and every minute is of value now.'

Stan could hear the enemy raging round the office they had just quitted; and then, after a little shouting, the shape of the door became visible, marked out as it was by faint lines of light, while from the keyhole came a vivid ray which cut through the black passage and formed a dull spot upon the wall at the end.

'Let's go up now,' said Uncle Jeff, 'and do a little firing from one of the upstair windows.'

'Do you mean to come down here again?' asked Stanley's father.

'Not while these ruffians are near.—What do you say, Stan?'

'It would be like throwing our lives away, uncle.'

'Quite right, my boy. No; we will lock the door at the top of the stairs and then barricade it. We shall be pretty safe then from attack made below.'

'They will try to reach us by one of the first-floor windows.'

'Yes; but they will only be able to come up one at a time, and so long as the ammunition lasts I think we can keep them back.—Why, Stan, my lad, this is a queer experience for you,' continued Uncle Jeff as, taking everything quite coolly, he helped his brother to lock and carefully secure what was literally the front-door of their dwelling, although it was entered by means of a flight of steps, and was on the first floor of the newly built house.

'Yes, uncle, it is strange,' said the boy quietly: 'but it seems very horrible for you and my father.'

'Eh?' said Uncle Jeff dryly. 'Well, yes, it is

rather horrible, but mostly so for the Chinamen. There! let's get to one of the windows, and'——

'Yes, uncle—quick! That one to the left. Oh, pray make haste!'

'Why?' said Stan's father, impressed by his son's sudden display of excitement.

'I saw the top of a ladder faintly showing against the sky.'

As the lad finished speaking, proof of his assertion came in the shape of a little shower of splintered glass driven out of one of the window-sashes to fall tinkling into the dark room.

Almost at the same moment Stan obeyed the first dictates of his common-sense as called forth by the emergency; for, without waiting to be told, he raised the pistol he held and took a quick aim in what he considered to be the right direction.

A loud yell was the result, and as Stan's father rushed to the window to follow up the shot with another, he held his hand, and stood looking down into the dimly seen group below. He was just in time to make out faintly the top of a ladder describing an arch above the crowd beneath, while, clinging to it and crying for help, there, like a bundle of clothes, was the figure of the man who had first attempted the escalade.

Stanley caught a glimpse of the figure too, and rushed to the window, just in time to see the crowd in motion and the luckless, already wounded Chinaman come heavily down among his friends.

'Will they try again, father?' whispered Stan, as if in fear of his words being heard through the broken window.

'Unless help comes,' was the reply, given in a tone which seemed to Stanley to suggest that the enemy would be sure to return, and before long.

'But if they do try to raise the ladder again, Stan, my boy,' said Uncle Jeff cheerily, 'why, you must show your skill with the pistol once more. Why, boy, I couldn't have shot like that!'

'Jeff,' said Stan's father hurriedly, 'I can hear them busy below.'

'Trying to get up? Well, they have got their work cut out. But, hullo! what's that? Smashing up the office furniture.'

'Yes; that's it, uncle. Listen; you can hear it quite plainly.'

'Poor, child-like beggars!' said Uncle Jeff contemptuously. 'How I should like to have the lot trapped by a company of foot, and then see them thoroughly caned like schoolboys! Yes, they are smashing things up pretty well. Bad job, Oliver, for we shall have to furnish the whole office again, and rebuild it, too, with the rest of the place.'

'Oh, not so bad as that, Jeff!' said Stanley's father.

'Yes, my lad; you may make up your mind for the worst. Don't you grasp why they are breaking up the things?'

'Fire?' cried Stanley excitedly.

'Right, my lad. They're going to burn us out.'

Stanley's father stamped heavily upon the floor in the impotent rage he felt.

'What's to be done, Jeff?' he said. 'They'll beat us now.'

'Fire for fire, brother Oliver,' said Uncle Jeff

through his teeth.—'Here, Stan, my lad, don't you begin thinking that your uncle is a bloodthirsty wretch, because all he asks for here is to be let alone to make his living and a bit to spare.—Do you hear, sir?'

'Yes, uncle,' said Stan, who had more ears for the sounds below than for his uncle's words.

'That's right, then. The Chinese can run away if they like, but if they don't they must take their chance of getting bullets through them.—Now, Oliver, old lad, set the example. We can't stand here to be roasted to death, for it would be very unpleasant; so shoot as many of the wretches as you can.—And you, Stan, my boy, help him. Ah, look out! They're raising the ladder again.'

Both Stan and his father saw the peril at the same moment, and they rushed forward, Stan following his father's example and beating out a pane of glass with the butt of his revolver so as to make room to fire.

They were invisible to the attacking party, but the noise made by the falling glass directed the attention of the mob to their presence, and they were saluted by a savage burst of yelling and a shower of missiles, which did no more harm than to destroy a pane or two of glass.

It was different with the fire the enemy drew: for, feeling that they were regularly fighting for their lives, and growing desperate, Stan and his father watched the moving ladder, whose end came with a sharp rap against the sill of the window. As soon as the upper part was darkened by the figure of a man, Oliver Lynn fired, there was a yell, and the

man stood fast. But another rushed up to his support, and this time Stanley fired. The new arrival let go his hold of the ladder-sides, jerked himself back, and fell headlong on to the people watching his progress.

But the sight of their falling friends only enraged the attacking party, and another man or two rushed up the ladder, just as Uncle Jeff seized and threw the window wide open, waited his time, and feeling more than seeing that the men were crowding up, stepped out on the sill, seized the top of the ladder, and raising it up a little, made one tremendous heave and thrust, forcing it outward till it was perfectly perpendicular. Then he gave a final thrust and sent it outwards, the mob below yelling, and some of those on the rungs of the ladder beginning to leap off before it went over backwards with a loud crash, but unfortunately taking Uncle Jeff with it, for he found it impossible to recover his balance.

CHAPTER II.

'KEEP UP THE FIRING.'

'GONE!' gasped Stan as he looked down into the seething darkness.

'Don't stand talking, boy!' cried his father angrily. 'Fire — fire to keep the enemy off. Be careful—be quick!'

He set the example, keeping up a steady delivery of shots from his revolver, Stan giving shot for shot, but with his hand trembling so that he could not take aim. Then all at once, to his intense delight, the firing seemed to be answered from out of the darkness below, but against the enemy, it being plain after the first shot that Uncle Jeff had regained his feet and had joined in the pistol practice with such effect that for the moment the enemy took to flight.

'Keep up the firing,' shouted Uncle Jeff from out of the darkness; and his order was obeyed, while the speaker seized the ladder lying upon the ground and succeeded in raising it erect and then letting the top lean against the window.

In another minute the sill was reached; and this time, being more upon his guard, Uncle Jeff succeeded in maintaining his balance as he thrust the ladder away again, for it to fall with a heavy, splintering crash which broke it quite in two, just as the mob

of assailants came rushing back again, ready to attack the besieged with all their might.

'Howl away, you ruffians!' cried Uncle Jeff as he climbed in again, for just then a yell of disappointment arose from the enemy as they found the ladder broken. But directly after they had seized the longer piece and reared that up, to begin mounting afresh; but, to the great relief of the attacked, it was too short, and the first man could only hold on by the window-sill and try to drag himself up.

He managed to get a good hold with one hand, while with the other, from which a great knife hung by means of a piece of cord, he, after gripping his weapon, smashed in the lower panes of glass, and then began hacking at the window-bars.

'Stand back, Stan,' cried Uncle Jeff, 'or he'll get a cut at you with that knife. Do you hear?'

Stan heard, but too late, for in his excitement he had seized his revolver by the muzzle so as to use the butt like a club, and rushed forward to the rugged opening.

He could see the big Chinaman as he hacked away, but for the moment the man did not see him. Then, with an angry snarl, he threw back the blade of his heavy knife till the top of it touched his shoulder, and struck with all his might at the lad's unguarded head.

For the moment it seemed as if Stan's career was at an end. But first blow in fighting means a great deal, and certainly it did here, for the butt of the pistol came down with a crash on the fingers of the Chinaman's left hand, which was snatched away

completely numbed. The cut from the knife fell short, its deliverer dropping sharply downward on to the man close below him, making him give way in turn, and sending the weight of two men upon the third, who involuntarily joined in loading the fourth, who in turn helped to sweep the fifth from the ladder, which the next moment was quite clear.

'Bravo, Stan!' cried Uncle Jeff.—'Now, Oliver, old lad, let's get the dining-table up edgeways against the window and fire from behind it.—Quick! —That's the way; let it rest with its legs sideways on the floor.'

The heavy wood table made a splendid breastwork, though as soon as it was reared up across the window it shut out half the dim light, which was just enough to enable the defenders to see their way. And now, in obedience to Uncle Jeff's hurriedly issued command, exhausted cartridge-cases were withdrawn, and the barrels rested upon the edge of the table so as to steady the aim the next time a head appeared.

'What's to be the next thing?' said Uncle Jeff.

'Fire,' said his brother grimly.

'I hope not,' whispered Stan; 'but they're chopping again below. Hark! you can hear them plainly.'

'Yes, it sounds bad, my boy; but help must come soon. I say, Stan.'

'Yes, uncle.'

'I thought you were done for, and I hardly know now how you managed to escape.'

'It was close, uncle; but I'm afraid I must have crushed the man's fingers horribly.'

'Poor fellow!' said Uncle Jeff dryly.

'Here, Jeff,' said his brother hoarsely; 'do you smell that?'

'Oh yes, I can smell it; I did a minute ago. Look! that 's smoke rising past the window.'

'Yes, I thought it was,' said Stan huskily; 'but I was in hopes that it was from our firing.'

'No,' said Uncle Jeff; 'it 's from their firing, my lad; and with such an ally we shall be done for. —Oliver, old fellow, we must beat a retreat.'

'How can we? The wretches are at back and front.'

'Yes, it is awkward, Oliver, but we shall not be able to stay here long.'

'We must make for the next floor.'

'All the farther to jump when the bad time comes.'

'Look out, father!—They 're coming up again, uncle.'

The table proved invaluable now, for as the enemy made a fresh attack, swarming up the broken ladder, shots were delivered steadily, and the blows struck by the savage wretches fell vainly upon the stout, hard wood.

Three men fell headlong, but their places were taken directly by others, who were maddened by disappointment, and made the table quiver with the blows they managed to strike with the clumsy axes and swords they bore, till the sharp crack of one of the revolvers tumbled the savage wretches back upon their comrades below, who uttered a chorus of savage yells and threats at every fresh mishap.

But still they came on, till after four final discharges there was a sharp, cracking sound below; glass had evidently been shivered in one of the

lower windows, and a rush of flame illumined the smoke that now floated up thickly, while for the first time the besieged had a view of their fierce enemies, who paused from their attack and stood back watching the progress of the mischief they had done.

'Don't show yourselves in the light, either of you,' said Uncle Jeff, doing at once that which he had forbidden.

'Then don't you!' cried Stan's father. 'Keep back, man—keep back!'

'Directly, old fellow,' said his brother. 'I only want to see what they are about to do next. They 're busy about something.'

'I can see,' cried Stan excitedly from where he crouched with one eye over the edge of the table. 'They 're carrying the men who have fallen away out of the light.'

'What!' cried Uncle Jeff. 'Why, so they are—thirty of them at least, hard at work. Well, they have some humanity in them after all.'

'It 's almost too good to be true, Jeff,' said Stan's father, 'but I believe they are giving us up for a bad job.'

'You 're right, Oliver,' was the excited reply. 'That 's it; they find us too hard nuts to crack.'

'They feel that the fire will bring help, and that it is time to be off. Come and help to remove the barricade; we must escape before the fire takes a firmer hold.'

'Wait a moment, both of you,' cried Uncle Jeff. 'Yes. Hurrah in a whisper. Don't shout. It 's all right; they are making off, and we are saved.'

'You forget the fire, Jeff,' said Stanley's father sadly.

'Not I. Let 's hurry down and see what mischief has been done.'

'No, no,' cried Stan excitedly as the glow from beneath increased; 'they are coming back again.'

'What!' cried Uncle Jeff. 'No, you are wrong this time; it is a fresh mob from the busy part of the town, coming to see what plunder they can get from the fire.'

'Yes, I think you 're right,' said Stanley's father—'come to see our ruin.'

'Who 's that talking about ruin?' said Uncle Jeff scornfully as, with Stan's help, he took down the barricade and unfastened bar and bolt. 'Let 's see what mischief the fire has done before we talk of that.'

'Think of saving our lives,' said Stan's father excitedly. 'Never mind the rest.'

'But I do mind the rest,' cried Uncle Jeff.—'Come along, Stan. Never say die! I don't believe the fire has had time to take much hold.'

'What are you going to do?' cried Stan's father.

'Make a dash for the outer office, where the buckets hang. They 're all full.'

'For heaven's sake take care! Don't run any risks.'

Uncle Jeff did not seem to hear him, but ran down the stairs, to find the lobby full of smoke. His first act was to dash out the panes of glass in a fanlight to admit the fresh air, while directly after he threw open the door, whose fastenings Stan had by his instructions loosened.

'Keep back,' cried Stan's father; 'it is madness.'

'Bah!' said Uncle Jeff, who had a better view

of the state of affairs. 'Take a long breath and follow me.'

In his excitement Stan had just one glimpse of the office interior, where towards the window a great bonfire-like heap was blazing away, licking the side about the opening, and forming a column of fire and smoke which went wreathing and darting out, many-tongued, to rise high in the night air, spreading out towards the wharf, and making the water of the river beyond gleam, while a busy hum of many voices greeted them from beyond the flame and smoke.

'We can do nothing, Jeff,' cried Stan's father; 'only escape for our lives. It is madness to try and do anything.'

'Then let 's be mad, old fellow.—Bah! Nonsense! The draught carries all the fire from us, and we can breathe easily. Rouse up, man!'

'I am roused up,' cried Stan's father angrily; 'but I must think of my boy.'

'Don't!' roared Uncle Jeff; 'he 's big enough to think for himself.—Now, Stan, out through this door and get a bucket of water. Do as I do.—Come on, Oliver.'

'But the ceiling 's catching. The place will be all in flames directly.'

'Of course it will if we stand still and watch it. Come on.'

He led the way through the door before him, making a sudden rush past the blazing heap, and the other two followed, each lifting down a bucket of water from the dozen hanging in a row on the pegs where Uncle Jeff's foresight had had them placed ready for such an emergency. As soon as he had

seized his pair of buckets he stepped back through the brightly illuminated door; and as Stan quickly followed him, the two stood together, the boy feeling the scorching glow of the flames upon his face.

'Let me do the throwing, Stan,' said Uncle Jeff calmly, as he set one bucket on the floor. 'Stand back, and look out for the choking steam.'

Then, with a clever whirl of the bucket, he sent its contents in a curve, spreading as it were so much golden liquid metal over the flames, a good sprinkling striking the woodwork on both sides of the window; and in an instant the sharp hissing of the encounter between fire and water was accompanied by a change, the fire still blazing furiously, but a great cloud of steam being formed, the odour of which struck Stan as abominable.

'Bravo!' cried Uncle Jeff. 'Smell the hydrogen, my lad?'

As he spoke he set down his empty bucket, took up the full one at his feet, and scattered its contents in the same way and with a similar effect to that which had preceded it.

'Now,' he cried, 'set down your two buckets, my lad; take back my empty ones, and bring two more. —Set yours down too, Oliver,' he continued coolly, 'and do as the boy does—unless you want to play fireman.'

'No, no; go on,' said Stan's father. 'Splendid, my dear boy! Go on.'

'Yes, I'll go on,' said Uncle Jeff coolly; 'only one mustn't waste a drop.'

As he spoke he scattered the contents of both

Stan's buckets, and then those of his brother, so deftly over the blazing woodwork that by the time the first six had been emptied the heart of Stan's father rose with relief, for the change was wonderful. Then, as the second six bucketfuls were being thrown, the first two right upward to the ceiling, whence they began to drip in a steady shower whose drops hissed and crackled where they fell, it became evident that very little further effort would be needed to master the flames. In fact, now that the twelve buckets were nearly all exhausted, Stan found himself able to throw out the empty ones to some of the men who had gathered outside, plenty of willing hands being ready to catch them; and under the directions given in English by a loud voice outside, the men—coolies, most of them—hurried down to the edge of the wharf where the river ran muddily, and a second dozen buckets nearly finished the task.

'Stitch in time saves nine—eh, Stan?' cried Uncle Jeff merrily; 'and a tumblerful of water at the beginning of a fire is better than a hogshead at the end.—H'm! there's plenty of help now, Oliver. We're not ruined yet, old man.'

'Thank heaven, no, Jeff!' said his brother. 'I wish I had your coolness and nerve.'

'And I wish I had your nous, old fellow,' replied his brother quietly. 'But there! we won't have the place flooded. I'll scatter about a couple of dozen more buckets over the smoking and charred wood; and then, as the mob gathering out there must be thirsty, we will distribute a few strings of copper money among them to make up for the chance of plunder that they have missed.'

Friendly voices by the score were now heard making inquiries; the help was plentiful, and in less than an hour clever carpenters were hammering away, replacing the broken and burned windows with a lattice-work of bamboo. Soon after a late-arriving party of the city guard were pursuing the marauders, while a certain number were posted about the offices and warehouse to protect the rich stores within from 'friendly' and unfriendly attack.

But there was no sleep for the Lynns that night, and daylight made such a display of the effects of the night's business that Stan's first disposition was to burst out laughing in his uncle's face.

'Eh? What is it? Why are you grinning at me, sir?' said the object of Stan's mirth.

'I couldn't help it, uncle,' said the lad apologetically. 'Go and have a wash, and just look at your face.'

'Blackened a bit? Well, it does smart.'

'Why, Jeff,' cried Stan's father, 'your eyebrows, eyelashes, and beard are completely burned away.'

'What!' cried Uncle Jeff angrily. 'My beautiful great beard? Oh! that comes of trying to save this wretched old house and store.—Why, you heartless young ruffian,' he roared as he met his nephew's mirthful eyes, 'you are laughing at my misfortune. Do you know what a loss like this means to me?'

'Yes, uncle,' replied Stan: 'waiting until it grows again.'

Uncle Jeff's countenance was a study as he stood staring at his nephew, his forehead all in wrinkles, eyes screwed up, and lips compressed, till all at once the muscles relaxed, his eyes opened widely, and a

frank, pleasant smile of satisfaction began to make him look genial and sunny.

'Why, of course!' he cried. 'I was going to put it down as a dead loss. I never thought of that, Stan. To be sure, it's only a bit of waiting for it to grow again. Here, I can't go out in this state. Call Sin the Wicked, Stan.'

'Yes, uncle,' was the reply, and Stan hurried out.

CHAPTER III.

'A BLOODTHIRSTY YOUNG RUFFIAN.'

TAN had been long enough in the great port to know something of the habits of the people, and he was in nowise surprised to find that not one of the employees had put in an appearance that morning; nor yet that Pi Sin, the general man-of-all-work of the household, who slept in the house, was nowhere to be found, for the simple reason that he had dropped from one of the windows and made off at the first alarm.

The lad was balked, then, at the offset, and had to return to his uncle for instructions.

'Gone — eh?' said Uncle Jeff. 'Of course he would go. It doesn't take much to scare one of his kind. You'll have to fetch the barber for me, Stan. Know where he lives?'

'No,' said Stan.

'Keep along the wharf-side till you come to the big pagoda half a mile along the river, and then go down the narrow lane under the pagoda walls till you come to his place, just opposite the gate. You'll see his shop. Tell him to come at once.'

'Can he speak English?'

'After a fashion; and half-a-dozen other languages

too. Tell him he must come back with you. He'll say he can't leave home, but you say the one word "Dollar" and he'll come at once.'

'I understand, uncle,' was the reply; and the boy started off, feeling as if all the previous night's experience had been a dream, and as if he were still only half-awake.

He was glad to escape from the dwelling over the offices, with their black, dismantled look, where all was charred wood, wet with the little deluge of water that had been poured thereon.

The lad sniffed two or three times involuntarily as he made his way out to pass through a crowd of staring idlers of all sorts and sizes, dressed in blue cotton jackets and trousers, save those whose costume half-way down was a pigtail only, the other half to the ground consisting of a pair of baggy, much-washed cotton trousers, tight at the ankles, and tucked into clumsy shoes with thick white soles. They were all staring vacantly at the damaged office and shattered windows; while the broken ladder, propped up in two pieces, was placed against the front of the house, and formed the greatest attraction of all, till Stan appeared, when about two hundred and fifty pairs of beady, piggish eyes were turned upon him, and there was a quiver of pigtails of all lengths, from a few inches to those of the finest growth, which tapped against the owners' heels as they walked.

'I suppose I shall get to know one face from another in time,' thought Stan as the crowd made way for him, 'but at present they all seem to be alike. My word! I do feel glad to get out. The place smelt like a school bonfire put out for fear of

risk, or as the kitchen did when the cook upset part of the soup into the fire and made the rest taste just the same as this smells.—Oh, do get out of the way, some of you!' he said aloud impatiently. 'Can't you see that I'm in a hurry?'

'You wantee Sin?' said a high-pitched voice close behind; and Stan stopped short to face a particularly meek-looking, full-moon-countenanced Chinaman in the cleanest of cotton clothes, and without a wrinkle of trouble in his placid face.

'Wantee you? Yes,' said Stan angrily, for wakefulness, over-exertion, and hunger combined had put his nerves in a state of compound irritation. The sight of the man, too, brought up ideas of breakfast, as well as bitter annoyance against him for his desertion of them in their time of peril. 'Why did you run away last night?'

'Lun away? Sin no lun away. Dlop down flat and clawl away so lobbee man not see.'

'Well, it's all the same,' cried Stan. 'Oh, you were a coward to desert us like that!'

The Chinaman smiled feebly, and there was a look of apology in his eyes as he said meekly:

'Plentee bad man makee Sin all aflaid. One man enough one man fight. One man can'tee fight gleat many. Only one Sin takee big knife and chop off head.'

'But you went away instead,' growled Stan sourly. 'Look here, sir, I've a good mind to kick you.'

'What good? Stan-lee kick Sin, Sin go 'way and cly. No good cookee bleakfast.'

'Then I won't kick you,' said the boy, who felt mollified by the suggestion of hot tea and cake

contained in the man's speech. 'Here! run off and fetch the barber. Bring here.'

'No come. Shavee many man.'

'You say "Dollar," and bring him along.'

The Chinaman grinned and nodded.

'Come now,' he said, and turned to go, but stopped short directly to look curiously at his young master.

'Well,' said Stan, 'why don't you go?'

'Wantee go? Stan-lee wantee man to shave him?'

'To shave me? Nonsense! To shave my uncle.'

'What good shave uncle? Uncle killee. All loasted 'way in big fi'.'

'Nonsense! He wasn't hurt.'

'Not killee?'

'No.'

'Not Mistee Lynn killee?'

'What! My father?'

The man nodded quickly.

'No; we fought the enemy and beat them off.'

'Sin velly glad,' said the man, smiling. 'All say Mistee Jeff-lee and Mistee Lynn allee kill dead and loast black. Velly good job fo' Sin. No go find new mastee. Sin lun fas' now.'

He set off at a very slow dog-trot, and the lad looked after him for a few moments before walking back through the staring crowd, who had caught from Sin the refutation of their news, and were chattering eagerly, and, as it seemed to Stan, looking disappointed at the fact that neither of the English merchants had been killed. In fact, the information just received had reduced a serious catastrophe into nothing better than a pitiful fire and the breaking of

a few windows; but the crowd stopped and stared all the same, just as persistently as a London gathering would round a house where something or another had happened.

'You've been pretty quick, Stan,' said his father as the lad entered the room where the brothers were discussing the night's proceedings, with their loaded revolvers lying upon the table.

Uncle Jeff turned sharply and stared.

'You haven't been?' he said as he passed his hand slowly over his singed face.

Stan told of his meeting with their Chinese cook and general man.

'The cowardly ruffian!' cried Uncle Jeff angrily. 'Did he say anything about leaving us in the lurch last night?'

Stan told him.

'Of course. Velly much aflaid. Just like a Chinaman; but they're brave enough when they're fifty to one, as they were last night. He ought to have stood by us, Stan. We've behaved well to him.'

'He's a very good servant, Jeff,' said Stan's father, 'and works well for us. Don't bully the man for what he cannot help.'

'I'm not going to, Oliver. I know, and I'll forgive him if he'll only make haste back, bring that precious barber, and get us some breakfast. I'm starving.'

As it happened, the unhappily named man came hurrying back with the razor-wielder; and soon after the latter had performed his task, turning Uncle Jeff into a bluff-looking middle-aged man with closely

cut hair, smooth chin, and a short, fierce moustache, Sin made his appearance at the door, to smilingly announce that 'bleakfast' was 'leady,' and then stood fast, wide open of eyes, extended of lips, and shaking gently.

'You scoundrel!' cried Uncle Jeff. 'If you dare to laugh at my misfortunes I 'll kick you downstairs.'

'Pi Sin no laugh at Mistee Jeff's misfoltunes,' said the man piteously. 'Him laugh see mast' look so 'live and well when Sin tink um dead and bellied. Gleat pity didn't make shave all head and weah long tail.'

'Oh, that's it, is it?' said Uncle Jeff, who was mollified by the man's words. 'Well, what's for breakfast?'

'Coffee, hot cake'——

'What!' cried Uncle Jeff. 'You've had no time to make hot cakes.'

'Pi Sin buy um all leady at bakee when he go fetch shave-man.'

'Oh, that's how you managed—eh?' said Uncle Jeff.

Sin smiled.

'Make poke-pie yes'day. Nice cold.'

'That'll about do—eh, Stan?' said Uncle Jeff.

'Capitally, uncle.'

'Got any appetite after your fighting?'

'Oh yes, uncle; it has made me terribly hungry.'

'Then come along.'

'Hah!' said Uncle Jeff, about a quarter of an hour later, as he wiped his lips with a paper napkin. 'Who'd ever have thought we should be having such a breakfast as this in the old place—eh, Oliver?'

'I for one fully expected that we should be buried in its ashes,' said Stan's father.

'Humph!' said Uncle Jeff; 'then next time you think such dolorous things keep them to yourself, and don't say them to spoil your son's breakfast.'

'They don't spoil my breakfast a bit, Uncle Jeff. More pie, please.'

'You're right, Stan. Sin is a good cook, even if he is no use as a fighting-man.'

'Splendid, uncle.'

'And we'll forgive him—eh?'

'Certainly, uncle.'

Five minutes later the object of these remarks appeared, to say that a party of gentlemen had arrived.

It was a deputation from the foreign merchants of the port, to offer condolences and help to their brethren; and on finding how little the Lynns had suffered, they did not hesitate to tell them that they might have expected the fate that befell them, which was like a judgment upon them for erecting their warehouse and stores so far away from their brother-merchants, and prophesied more evil to them if they failed now to remove to a safer position.

'Likely!' said Uncle Jeff. 'Who's going to pull a great place like this down and build another?'

This after their friends had gone.

'It is impossible, of course, Jeff,' said Stan's father sadly. 'We must content ourselves with strengthening this a little more, and hope to escape by being more ready for an attack.'

By this time clerks and warehousemen—the latter Chinese—were busy at work over their daily avoca-

tions, just as if nothing had happened, though the remarks among themselves were many. The native craftsmen, too—carpenters, painters, and glaziers—were busy repairing damages, just as if, Stan thought, it was a town in old England, instead of in the far east of Asia, when a Chinese messenger arrived, a round-faced, carefully dressed, middle-aged man, who had come in charge of a consignment of silk from the collecting *hong* of Lynn Brothers' house down south on the Mour River; and one of the passages in the letter the man brought from their manager was the cause of a good deal of perplexity at such a time.

Stan entered the room after a quiet inspection of the messenger, who smiled at him blandly and then began to carefully trim and polish the nails of his forefingers, each of which was long and sharp and kept in a thimble-like sheath of silver; while, to indicate his higher position in life than the cook, the new arrival's dark-blue frock was of silk.

'It 's very, very awkward,' said Stan's father.

'Very,' said his brother. 'Quite impossible for me to go now.'

'It is not so much help he asks for as a companion,' said Stan's father.

'Some one trustworthy whom he can leave in charge for a short time while he is away buying or visiting at one or other of the *hongs* up the river.'

'Yes, that is the sort of man; but how are we to get such a person without sending to England?'

'But he wants him now, by return boat,' said Uncle Jeff testily. 'The fellow must be mad. Here, I have it,' he whispered, leaning across the table.

'You are busy, father. Shall I go?' said Stan, who noticed the movement.

'No,' cried Uncle Jeff sharply, answering for his brother. 'Sit down a bit. Perhaps we shall want you.—Here, Oliver,' he whispered; 'why not send Stan?'

'What! Oh, he's too young and inexperienced.'

'Not a bit too young, and the experience will come.'

'But it's so far away, and there may be risks.'

'Risks? Do you think it's going to be half so risky as staying here? Because if you do, I don't.'

'There is something in that,' said his brother.

'Of course there is; and we can't slave Blunt to death. I meant to have stayed with him a couple of months to lighten his work; but, as we have said, it is quite impossible. Stan would be the very fellow.'

The lad's father tapped the table with the tips of his fingers and frowned.

'Very well,' he said suddenly. 'He proved that he could play the man last night.—Here, Stan.'

'Yes, father.'

'Your uncle and I want you to go south to the Mour River—to our branch collecting-house there, under the charge of our Mr Blunt.'

'Very well, father,' said the lad, the news coming like a shock after the events of the past night.

'You'll find Blunt rather rough—such a man as ought to be named Blunt—but a good fellow at bottom,' said Uncle Jeff.

'I'm afraid you'll find it rather solitary, my boy,'

said Stan's father; 'but it will be a fine lesson in business, and you 'll learn a great deal.'

'Very well, father,' said the lad again coldly.

'Hullo, young man!' cried his uncle. 'What's the meaning of this? You ought to be jumping for joy at the thought of going to a new place, and you look as if you don't want to go,' said Uncle Jeff.

'I don't, uncle,' said the lad

'And pray why?' said his father.

'Because you are going to send me away, father, as you don't think it is safe for me here; and I don't want to leave you both in trouble.'

There was a dead silence, and the brothers exchanged glances, the eyes of both looking dark, before the senior spoke, holding out his hand to grasp that of his son.

'On my word of honour, no, Stan,' he said in a voice slightly affected by the emotion he felt. 'Indeed, it is because we are—your uncle and I—in a difficulty about responding to our Mour manager's demand. Your uncle was to go, but after last night's attack it would be impossible for him to leave me here alone.'

Stan gazed sharply from his father to his uncle and back again, with doubt shining out of his eyes; then he said in an eager, excited way:

'Then it isn't because I seemed cowardly last night, father?'

'Cowardly!' cried the brothers in a breath.

'And because you want to send me where I shall be safe?'

'No, my dear boy—no,' cried his father warmly.

'Not a bit of it, Stan, old chap,' cried Uncle Jeff. 'Why, we'd give anything to keep such a proved soldier with us. It's because we can't help ourselves that we want to send you.'

'Yes, Stan; your uncle is speaking the simple truth. But we will not press you if you feel that you would rather stay here with us.'

'Yes, father,' said the boy. 'I know it is dangerous, but I would rather stay here with you.'

'Hark at the bloodthirsty young ruffian!' cried Uncle Jeff, with something like a tremble in his voice. 'He wants to stop here and shoot down pirates by the score.'

'I don't, uncle!' cried the boy angrily.—'I want to be of use to you now, father, and not to think only of myself. I'm going to this place on that river, wherever it is, but I'm afraid I shan't be of so much use as you expect. I haven't learnt to be business-like at school, and I don't think classics and mathematics will do much good where you want me to go.'

'Don't you be too sure of that, my lad,' said Uncle Jeff. 'Your school studies have made you more business-like than you think, boy, and a chap who is good at mathematics can't help being good and exact over a merchant's books. Then you mean to go for us, sir?'

'Of course, uncle. When does the boat start?'

'Just hark at him!' cried Uncle Jeff. 'He's ready to be off at once.'

'But he isn't going so soon as that,' said Stan's father, wringing the boy's hand warmly, and seeming loath to let it go.—'I dare say you'll not start for

three or four days. There are plenty of vessels sailing, but it isn't every one that touches at the port from which you must go up the river in a trading-junk. But Wing will see to all that, and get you both passages in the first steamer that suits. Wing is a very good man for arrangements of that kind. In the meantime you must pack a portmanteau with just the necessaries you require—the simpler the better.'

'And before you go, my young pepper-pod, we 'll try if we can arrange for another piratical display with fireworks on the same scale as last night's. Will that do you?'

'Now you're beginning to laugh at me again, uncle,' said Stan in a reproachful tone.

'No, no, no, my dear boy,' cried Uncle Jeff warmly; 'if I talk lightly it is only to hide what I feel. I'd been looking forward to all kinds of expeditions up-country with you, whenever your father would let two such idlers go out for a run; but now we must wait till you come back with one of our boatloads of silk and tea and dyewoods.—Here, Oliver, we're in luck to have such a representative. —But I say, Stan, don't take any notice of my face being so bare, but set to work and grow a respectable beard of your own.'

'I shan't do that for years yet, uncle,' replied Stan, laughing.

'What! You don't know, boy. It's a wonderful climate out here for making your hair grow. Look at the Chinamen's tails!'

'Oh, but a lot of that's false, isn't it?'

'In some cases, my boy, but generally it is all

real; and if it were unplaited it would be longer. But don't you imitate John Chinaman. You don't want a long tail. You turn the hair-current from the back of your head on to your chin and let it grow there, so as to make you look big and fierce, ready for dealing with the Chinese merchants.'

'But I shall seem boyish for years to come, I'm afraid,' said Stan sadly. 'I look very young.'

'And a splendid thing, too,' said Uncle Jeff. 'Who wouldn't be you, to look young and feel young?—Eh, Oliver?—Oh, you young masculine geese who are always wishing that you were men, if you only knew what you are treating with contempt, how much better it would be for you! Why, I'd give—— That'll do; I've done. Here, I'm coming with you to your room to go over your togs and odds and ends with you. I think I can give you a bit of advice as to what to take and what to leave behind. Perhaps, too, I can give you two or three useful things. Haven't got a revolver of your own, I suppose?'

'No, uncle.'

'Then I'll give you that one—mine. It hits anything, to a dead certainty, if you hold it straight. Got any fishing-tackle?'

'Yes, uncle; hooks and lines with leads.'

'That's right. You may like to catch a few fish to make a change in your diet when it grows too regular. Wing cooks a little, but nothing like so well as Sin.—I suppose we can't spare him to go with Stan here, can we, Oliver?'

'No; it would not be possible,' said the latter, smiling; but his voice had a suggestion of sternness

in its tones as he added, 'And I'm sure that Stan will be quite content to rough it for a while with Mr Blunt, and as long as he gets plain, wholesome food, will not worry himself about the cook.'

'Hear him, Stan?' cried Uncle Jeff. 'That's the way your father snubs me because I like nice things, and refuse to insult my inside by giving it any kind of hugger-mugger mess that is put before me.—Well, I confess I do like a good dinner, Oliver, and I don't see much harm in it. Well, of course Stan will do his best for us. The Lynns always try to do their best—they can't help it. There! come along and let's see to your kit.'

'Don't be in a hurry, Jeff,' said Stan's father. 'Let's have in Wing and ask him about the return boat. He's a very methodical fellow, and I dare say his plans are already made.'

'To be sure; let's have him,' replied Uncle Jeff, who rose, went to the door, and called to one of the clerks to send the Chinaman in. 'I dare say that he has something up his sleeve about starting. Plenty of room there for any amount of plans—eh, Stan?' he added; with the result that when the man entered, bowing and smiling in his apologetic way, Stan's eyes immediately sought and searched the long, soft, blue silk appendages which hung well over the hands, revealing just the tips of the fingers, while from one hung out the corner of a pocket-handkerchief, and from the other the end of a fan.

A little conversation ensued, in which the Chinaman announced that he had arranged for two berths in the steamer on its return journey—either on its first, which would be in three days' time, or, if Stan

were not able to go then, on the second, which would be in a month—allowing for its sailing to the Mour River, loading up, and returning again.

'It is a very short time,' said Stan's father, with a sigh; 'but he must not wait for a month, Jeff.'

'Certainly not,' was the reply, followed by an echo of the brother's sigh.—'You 'll have to be off, Stan, short as the time is.—As for you, Wing, your people say they hate us foreign devils, as they call us.'

'Wing no fool, Mistee Jefflee,' said the Chinaman coolly.

'I know that, Wing. You are more of a rogue than fool, as the old saying goes. But what do you mean?'

'Wing no fool 'nuff call good mastee foleign devil. That what fool say.'

'That's true, Wing. We have always behaved well to you and paid you honestly.'

'Why Wing stay. Mastee Olivey, Mastee Jefflee good man. Topside mastee. Wing stop long time. You wantee Wing takee plop' ca'e young Lynn?'

'Yes; help him, and fight for him if it is necessary,' said Stan's father.

'Light. Wing bling him back some day. Mind nobody bleak him.'

'There, Stan!' cried Uncle Jeff bluffly, as he roared with laughter. 'Wing's going to take as much care of you as if you were a piece of choice china.'

'Yes; takee gleat ca'e young Lynn, young mastee. Bling him back some day.'

'Yes,' said Uncle Jeff; 'but mind this, my fine

fellow: if you come back some day without him, and say you couldn't bring him because you've got him broken, why, then'——

He stopped short as if to think out what punishment he would award, while the Chinaman's face expanded in a broad grin.

'Wing not fool, Mastee Jefflee,' he said. 'No come back no young Lynn, fo' mastee killee Wing.' Then, turning very serious: 'Young Lynn bloken, Wing bloken allee same. Young Lynn killee, bad man killee Wing too.'

'I see what you mean, my man,' said Stan's father gravely. 'You will fight for my son to the end.'

'No,' said the Chinaman, shaking his head and frowning; 'Wing can'tee fightee. Wing tly helpee young Lynn lun away. P'l'aps bad man killee both. Plentee bad man on Mou' Livah. Wing takee gleat ca'e young Lynn.'

'Yes; that's all right, Wing. We always trust you.'

The Chinaman nodded, smiled, and then approached Stan, taking his hand, bending down, and holding the back against his forehead.

'There, Stan,' said his father; 'you will find Wing a faithful servant, and you can trust him to help you out of difficulties, for his knowledge of his fellow-countrymen will enable him to give you warning of things which would be hidden from you. —Do you fully understand, Wing, what I am saying to my son?'

The Chinaman bowed, and was soon afterwards dismissed.

The next three days were pretty well taken up in watching the repairs of the lower part of the great warehouse, and in making the final preparations for the start to Mour River; and during that time Stan had the satisfaction of learning that the principal merchants of Hai-Hai had joined in asking for better protection of their property in the great port—a demand which was responded to by those in authority arranging for a section of the military police force being stationed nightly within easy reach of the hitherto unprotected up-river part where the Lynns' warehouse was situated. And this was talked over on the morning when Stan and his Chinese attendant and guide stood on the deck of the steamer talking to the brothers Lynn, Uncle Jeff telling the lad that he was to take care of himself and not fidget about them, for they would be safe enough now, a pistol-shot out of a window being warning enough to bring armed assistance in a very few minutes.

'We shall be all right, Stan,' said Uncle Jeff heartily; 'it is we who will have to fidget about you.'

'Yes, he is quite right, Stan, my boy,' said the lad's father, grasping his hand warmly. 'Send us a line as often as a boat loads up at the *hong*.'

'And you will write to me, father?' said Stan, whose heart was sinking now that the time of parting was so near.

'Of course—regularly, my boy.'

'And you too, Uncle Jeff?'

'I mean to keep a journal, Stan, and post it up regularly like a day-book, all for your benefit.

There! the time will soon slip by, and you'll be coming home again. Ah! there goes the last bell.'

'So soon?' said Stan excitedly.

His words were almost rendered inaudible by the shouts of 'All for the shore!'

It was a hurried scene of confusion then for a few minutes, with repeated warm pressures of the hand in silence, and then Stan's eyes were being strained after a boat that had suddenly seemed to glide away when the steamer quivered and throbbed and threw up a chaos of foaming water astern. In that boat the brothers Lynn were standing up waving their hats, and the little craft seemed to go faster and faster though the two rowers had not yet lowered their oars.

Stan leant over the rail of the steamer, waving his hat in return, while the boat grew less and less, his father's features blurred and indistinct, and the great wharf seemed to be flying now while the steamer stood still. Then the boats that had taken people to the shore were all mixed up together in one patch, and the lad felt that his hat-wavings were all in vain, and that it was impossible for them to be seen.

There was something like a solid sigh in Stan's throat, but he choked it down as he turned his head and looked inboard, to find that Wing the Chinaman, dressed now in blue cotton, was squatted down on the deck close behind him; and apparently he had been watching his actions all the time, for he nodded now and smiled compassionately in his young master's face.

'Young Lynn velly solly go 'way?' he said.

'Of course I don't like it—at first,' said Stan hurriedly, and feeling ready to resent the compassion of the man who was to be his servant.

'Wing not likee leave him fadee, modee, one time long time off. Don'tee mind now. Young Lynn, Wing mastee, not mind soon. You likee eatee dlinkee?'

'Not now,' said Stan shortly.

'No?' said the Chinaman, as the steamer began to rise and fall steadily. 'Young Lynn go velly sickee? You likee lie down? Wing fetch bundle put undee head.'

'No, no,' said Stan quickly. 'I'm not going to be ill if it keeps like this. I don't think I should be bad if it were to come on rough.'

'No?' said Wing. 'Young Lynn velly good sailor. Good like Wing. Wing velly glad. Not nicee be velly sick when steamship go up, and velly much baddee when steamship go down. Wait see.'

Wing did 'wait see,' and as the steamer passed well out of the estuary, and began to run down the coast, they had a little of the vile Chinese weather that takes the form of a gale which piles the water well up and hurls it in cascades over a vessel's bows, making her quiver through and through, and putting her officers' seamanship well to the test. But even at the very worst, during the following day, Stan displayed no disposition to keep below, but went about the deck, holding on, and rather enjoying the grandeur of the scene; while Wing was always close at hand watching him, ready to smile in his face from time to time, and more than once gave vent to his satisfaction by saying:

'Young Lynn velly fine sailoh; 'most good as Wing. You feel leady to go down eatee big dinnee?'

'Yes,' said Stan eagerly; 'this cool wind gives me a good appetite;' and he made for the cabin stairs, closely followed by his attendant, who had seen a little, careful procession going on from the galley, a sign that the midday meal was ready for such of the passengers as were ready for it.

CHAPTER IV.

'HERE! YOU'D BETTER COME ASHORE.'

FOUL weather extended the voyage of the steamer to a length of five days before she reached the little port of destination, where, in the midst of a glorious change, Stan followed his conductor into a great clumsy junk, which was sailed when the windings of the fine, broad Mour River made the wind favourable, and tracked by coolies hauling upon a huge twisted bamboo cable when the breeze was adverse for a couple of days more.

The up-river trip was most enjoyable, through a highly cultivated country teeming with an industrious population and glowing with abundant crops; while the scenery was so glorious, and the novelty of the continuous panorama so great, that Stan felt a chill of disappointment at sunset one glowing evening when Wing, who had crept quietly up behind him, touched his shoulder, and stood pointing towards a village at the foot of a grand stretch of cliff, the houses rising up the beautiful terraced slope, while at the foot was a group of new-looking buildings, at the back of a wharf to which some half-dozen trading-boats were moored.

'Nang Ti,' said Wing, with a broad smile. 'Young

Lynn big *hong* full silk, full tea, full nicee piecee chop chop all along young Lynn. See big Blunt soon. Young Lynn savee big managee Blunt?'

'No; I have never seen him,' said Stan as he sheltered his eyes from the ruddy orange sunlight and scanned the place.

'Velly big stlong man. Velly good man. Velly big shoutee tongue say "Ho!" and "Ha!" Flighten stlong coolie man; makee wuck. Coolie go dlink much *samshu*, lie down, go sleepee; Blunt come behind, takee pigtail, pullee up, and kickee velly much. Makee coolie cly "Oh!" Makee loll ovey and ovey, and say leady to go wuck and nevey dlink *samshu* no mo'.'

'Indeed!' said Stan, who began to picture in his own mind what sort of a personage the manager in charge might be. 'And then, I suppose, after being kicked for getting tipsy on *samshu*, the men never drink any more?'

'No,' said Wing, grinning more widely. 'Velly much flighten. Nevey dlink any mo' till next time. Poh! Gleat big silly boy, coolie. Gleat stlong man up to head—head like big baby chile. Much flighten when big Blunt come shout "Ho! ha!" Big piecee man, big Blunt. Mastee managee. Young Lynn mastee managee now. Flighten big Blunt.'

'Indeed!' said Stan, smiling. 'Well, we shall see.'

'Yes, young Lynn see soon. Lookee! Big Blunt.'

Wing pointed again, and following the direction of the extended index-finger, Stan saw a tall figure in white step out of one of the buildings, make its way to where a crane stretched out its diagonal arm,

from which a chain with heavy ball and hooks was suspended over the river, and then stop to gaze at the junk upon whose high stern Stan and his companion were on the lookout.

Just then the *tindal*, or master of the junk, began to shout to his men, one of whom ran forward and began to thump a gong hanging in the bows, sending forth a booming roar whose effect was to bring a little crowd of half-naked coolies out of the buildings ashore, and three or four Europeans in white, while the crew of the junk began to swarm about the great clumsy vessel like bees.

The wind was favourable, and the great matting sails creaked and rustled, while their yards groaned as they rubbed against the bamboo masts as their sheets were tightened and pulled home, sending the heavy boat gliding up-river at an increased pace, soon getting abreast of the wharf, and then gliding along up-stream and leaving it behind.

'What does this mean?' said Stan excitedly. 'Doesn't the captain know we are to stop there?'

'Young Lynn soon see,' replied Wing. 'Velly fast lun watey big stleam. Young Lynn wait. Go 'long bit way. Captain know.'

He did know perfectly how to manage his clumsy craft, which, in obedience to his signs to the steersman, was run on in a diagonal course which took it in nearer to the bank from which the cliff ran up. Then, as a few yells were uttered, some of the men seized the ropes, others got out great sweeps, there was a bang on the gong, the two great sails came rattling down upon the deck, the long sweeps began to dip as the junk's pace grew slower and slower, till

she finally stopped and began to go back, but so slowly and well directed that she glided close alongside the wharf, whence men threw ropes; and in a wonderfully short time, considering the clumsiness of the craft and equipage, the junk was moored alongside so closely that it was possible to run a gangway aboard for the occupants to go ashore.

Stan was making ready to approach the gangway, when the figure in white approached the side, and without taking any notice of him, nodded to the Chinese captain shortly, and then turned to Wing.

'Hullo, you, sir!' he shouted in a big, vigorous voice, as if he meant himself to be heard back at the stern.

'Yes. Come back again,' said Wing.

'What made you so long?'

'Velly bad wind blow velly much indeed. Steamship no get 'long fast.'

'Humph! Bring me any letters?'

'Yes, bling big pack letteys. Got lot.'

'Come along, then, ashore; I 've no time to waste.'

'I shall never like you,' thought Stan to himself as he waited patiently for the manager to address him in turn. But the big, keen, masterful-looking fellow did not seem even to glance in the lad's direction, keeping his eyes fixed upon Wing, who seemed to be quite afraid of him, and did not venture to speak till the manager said loudly and sharply, as if to annoy the stranger:

'Who 's that boy you 've got on board there?'

Wing looked troubled, and glanced first at Stan and then at the speaker.

'Well, sir, why don't you answer?' continued the manager.

'Young Lynn. Come 'long flom Hai-Hai.'

'Oh!' said the manager gruffly. 'Whose son is he—Mr Oliver's or Mr Jeffrey's? Oh, I remember; Mr Jeffrey isn't married.' Then turning his eyes full upon Stan with a searching stare, he said shortly, 'How do? Here! you 'd better come ashore.'

CHAPTER V.

'HE'S A REGULAR BRICK.'

'THIS is pleasant!' thought Stan as he stepped on to the gangway. 'If this man is our servant he oughtn't to speak to me like that. Here! I shall have to go back by the next boat. Father and Uncle Jeff don't want me to be treated like this.'

It was a cheerless welcome to the place that was to be his new home for the time, and a feeling of resentment began to grow up within him as he stepped on to the wharf, meeting the manager's eyes boldly, and gradually feeling more and more determined to maintain his position and not allow himself to be, as he termed it, 'sat upon' by this bullying sort of individual.

A fierce stare was exchanged for some moments before the manager spoke again, more gruffly than ever, just as Wing handed him the packet of letters he had brought.

'Better come in here,' he said.—'You, Wing, tell the skipper to make all fast. I won't have any unloading till the morning.'

He led the way to what seemed to be the office of the great warehouse, for there were desks, stools, and writing implements, while maps hung from the wall,

and bills of lading in files decorated the place in a way which made it look more grim and showed up its bareness.

As soon as they were inside, the manager perched himself on a high stool, took a big ebony ruler off the desk, and began rolling it to and fro upon his knees, before opening the principal letter of the batch, one which Stan could see plainly had been written by his uncle.

This missive the manager read through twice before laying it flat upon the table and giving it a bang with his open hand.

'Bah!' he growled. 'Stan Lynn—Stan Lynn. What a name for a boy! Why did your people christen you that?'

'They didn't,' said Stan coolly, though he could feel a peculiar twitching going on along his nerves.

'What!' cried the manager fiercely—quite in the tone he would have used to a contradictory coolie. 'Why, look here,' he continued, bringing his hand down on the packet of letters with another heavy bang which made the ink start out of the well. 'Why, I have it here, in your father's handwriting. Um—um—um! Where is it? Oh, here: "my son Stan."'

'Nonsense! Let's look,' said the boy sharply, and quickly stepping forward to look at the writing. ''Tisn't; it's "Stanley," only my father has contracted the "ley" into a dash. It's a way he has.'

'Then it's time he began to write plainly. Who's to know what he means?'

'Any one,' said Stan quite as fiercely. 'And look

'Stan Lynn—Stan Lynn. What a name for a boy!'

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here; you wouldn't speak of my father's writing like that if he were here.'

'What!' roared the manager, giving the desk a tremendous bang with the big ebony ruler to frighten Stan, who began to perspire profusely, but not from alarm. His temper, that had been fast asleep, was aroused by the reception he was having, and feeling at once that life with this man would be unbearable, he spoke out at once boldly and defiantly.

'I spoke plainly enough,' he said haughtily, 'and you know what I said.'

'Well,' cried the manager, 'of all the insolent young coxcombs I ever encountered, you take the prize. Do you know who I am?'

'Yes,' said Stan; 'my father's manager.'

'Yes, sir, I am,' he roared; 'and I know how to manage men, let alone cocky, conceited boys. Don't you think you are coming here to lord it and set up your feathers, and crow and grow scarlet in the comb. I shall soon cut that for you, so just get ready to take your proper place at once. I'd have you to know that I have as much authority and am as much master in this solitary, out-of-the-way place as if I were a king.'

'Over the Chinese coolies, perhaps,' said Stan firmly, 'but not over me.'

'What!—Why, the boy's mad with conceit.'

'No, I'm not,' said Stan—'not conceited at all; and if you behave properly to me you'll find that I shall help you in every way I can.'

'Behave properly! Oh, come! this is rich. Here's a boy who ought to be at school, where he would get the cane if he did not behave himself,

vapouring about as if he had come to be master here. There! the sooner we understand each other the better—Mr Stanley—sir.'

There was a mocking sarcasm in the delivery of these last words that made the boy writhe. But he mastered his temper bravely enough, and said coolly:

'I don't want to be called "Mr Stanley" and "sir." I was christened Stanley, but my friends looked upon it as being too pretentious. They always call me Stan.'

'Oh, I see! Thank you for the kind explanation,' said the manager sarcastically. 'Well, here you are; and now you are here, what do you want? I see you 've brought a gun. Come snipe and duck shooting?'

'My father has fully explained in his letter, I believe.'

'Explained? Perhaps so; but I have not had time to read it yet, so perhaps you will speak.'

'That is easily done. You wrote to the firm asking for help and companionship.'

'Of course I did; and I took it for granted that Mr Jeffrey Lynn would come and share the burden of my enormously increasing work.'

'It is all explained in the letters, as I told you,' said Stan. 'Uncle was coming, but the Chinese made an attack on the place.'

'Eh? What 's that?' cried the manager excitedly; and Stan gave him a brief account of what had passed, while every word was listened to eagerly.

'It was quite out of the question for my father to be left,' ended Stan at last, 'and so I am sent to help instead.'

'Humph!' said the manager, looking grave. 'It has come to that, has it? Restless, uncontrolled savages. Well,' he added, changing his tone again, 'so they 've sent a boy like you?'

'Yes.'

'And for want of decent help and companionship, I 'm to make the best of you?'

'I suppose so,' said Stan coldly, and wishing the while that he was back at Hai-Hai, home, or anywhere but at this solitary *hong*.

'But I don't think you 'll like the life here, young fellow,' said the manager, with an unpleasant smile. 'There 's a very savage, piratical lot of Chinese about on this river. It has an awful character. If you 'll take my advice—— Will you?'

'Of course,' said Stan quietly. 'You must know better, from your experience here, than I do.'

'That 's right; I do. Well, then, you take it: go back by the next boat. It doesn't look as if things are very safe at Hai-Hai, but it 's a paradise to this place here.'

'I 'm sorry to hear that,' said Stan, 'but I certainly can't go back; I have come to stay.'

'Oh, very well!' said the manager. 'I 've warned you. I wash my hands of the whole affair. But I 'll promise you this: I 'll get your remains together.'

'My remains?' said Stan, aghast.

'Of course; they are sure to hack you to pieces—it 's a way they have. And there 'll be some difficulty, perhaps, in recovering your head. They generally carry that off as a trophy; but I 'll do my best to get you back to the old folks in a cask of Chinese palm-spirit. Will that do?'

During the past few moments Stan had felt a sensation as if cold steel of wondrously sharp edge were at work upon his back and across his neck; but the tone of the question brought him back to himself, and he replied calmly:

'Capitally. But, by the way, if the savage pirates come and treat me like that, where will you be?'

'Eh?' said the manager, staring. 'Where shall I be?'

'Yes. Isn't it just as likely that I should have to do this duty for you?'

'Oh, I see! Yes, of course; but—— Ha, ha, ha! Come! you have got something in you after all. You are pretty sharp.'

'Just sharp enough to see that you are trying to frighten me.'

'Humph!' ejaculated the manager, with a dry smile. 'But you've had a sample of what these people can do, and I won't answer for it that they don't try some of their capers here. Then you mean to risk it?'

'Of course,' said Stan. 'My father and uncle sent me to help you.'

'Well, don't blame me if you get your head taken off.'

'No,' said Stan coolly, and with a peculiar smile; 'I don't think I shall do that—then.'

'More do I,' said the manager grimly. 'Well, here you are, and I suppose I must make the best of you.'

'I suppose so,' said Stan.

'You'll have to work pretty hard—make entries and keep the day-book. I suppose you can do that?'

'I suppose so,' said the lad, 'but I can't say for certain till I try.'

'All right; then the sooner you try the better, because I've got enough to do here in keeping things straight; and if you find that you can't, I shall just pack you off back to your father and uncle. You're too young, and not the sort of chap I should have chosen for the job.'

'Indeed! What sort of a lad would you have chosen?'

'Oh, not a dandified, pomatumed fellow like you, who is so very particular about his collar and cuffs, and looks as if he'd be afraid to dirty his hands.'

'I don't see that because a fellow is clean he is not so good for work,' said Stan.

'Oh, don't you? Well, I've had some experience, my lad. I want here a fellow who knows how to rough it. You don't.'

'But I suppose I can learn.'

'Learn? Of course you can, but you won't. There! you've come, and I suppose, as I said before, I must make the best of you; but next time you see the heads of the firm, perhaps you'll tell them that I don't consider it part of my business as manager of this out-of-the-way place to lick their cubs into shape.'

'Hadn't you better write and tell them so?' said the lad warmly.

'What!' roared the man. 'Now just look here, young fellow; you and I had better come to an understanding at once. Whether it's clerk, warehouseman, or Chinese coolie, I put up with no insolence. It's a word and a blow with me, as sure as my name's Sam Blunt.'

'Sam!' said the lad quietly. 'What a name! Why did your people christen you that?'

The manager tilted his stool back till he could balance himself on two of its legs and let his head rest against the whitewashed wall of the bare-looking office, staring in astonishment at his visitor. Then leaning forward again, he came down on all four legs of his tall stool, caught up the big ebony ruler, and brought it down with a fresh bang upon the desk, which made the ink this time jump out of the little well in a fountain, as he stared fiercely at the lad, who returned his gaze perfectly unmoved.

'Well, of all'—— he said; he did not say what, but kept on staring.

'What sort of a fellow do you call yourself?' he cried at last.

'I don't know,' was the cool reply.

'No; I don't suppose you do. But look here; I'm going to look over that and set it down to ignorance, as you are quite a stranger; and so let me tell you there's only one man whom I allow to call me Sam Blunt, and I'm that man. Understand?'

The lad nodded.

'There! as you're the son of one of the principals, and don't know any better, I won't quarrel with you.'

'That's right,' said the lad coolly; and the man stared again.

'Because,' he continued, 'I'm thinking that we shall have plenty of quarrelling to do with John Chinaman.'

'Is there any likelihood of our going to war?' said the lad quickly.

'Every likelihood,' said the man, watching his

visitor keenly; 'and if I were you I'd have a bad attack of fever while my shoes were good.'

'I didn't know one could have, or not have, fever just as one liked.'

'I suppose not,' said his companion. 'But you take my advice: you catch a bad fever at once. And then, as there is no doctor anywhere here, and I'm a horribly bad nurse, I'll send you back to Hai-Hai at once for your people to set you right.'

'You mean sham illness?' said Stan sharply.

'What! Why, hang me if you're not a smarter fellow than I took you for! Yes, that's it; and then you'll go back and be safe.'

'Safe from what?'

'Being made into mincemeat by the first party of Chinese pirates who come this way. They're splendid for that, as I hinted to you before. Nothing they love better than chopping up a foreign devil like you.'

'Hadn't you better have a fever too?' said the lad quietly.

'Oh, come! Better and better!' cried the other. 'You're not such a fool as you look, young fellow! No: I've got too much to do to go away from this go-down, and your people know it. That's why they've sent you to get in my way and put me out of temper. I say, though; you've heard nothing about the breaking out of war?'

'Not a word since I've been in China. I heard something on my voyage.'

'Of course you haven't, or your father and uncle wouldn't have sent you down here. But you may take my word for it, there's trouble coming—and

that, too, before long. Did you see many piratical-looking war-junks as you came up the river?'

'N—no,' said Stan. 'I saw several big mat-sailed barges with high sterns, and great eyes painted in their bows; but I thought they were trading-boats.'

'So they are, my lad—one day; they 're pirates the next. And perhaps on the very next they 're men-o'-war. Anything, according to circumstances, for I 've found out that *artful* is the best word for describing a Chinaman. But there! you 'll soon know. Look here; after what I 've told you, do you mean to stay?'

'Certainly,' said Stan.

'Very well, then. Come and have a look at my quarters. They 're a bit rough, but you say you won't mind roughing it.'

'No,' said Stan; 'I 've come here to do the best I can.'

'Oh!' said the manager in a tone full of surprise; 'that 's what you 've come for, is it?'

'Of course,' said Stan, wondering at the tone the man had taken.

'Very well, then, we may as well shake hands. I was just thinking of sitting down to dinner when the junk came in sight, so you 'll come and join me—eh?'

'Yes,' said Stan; 'I am getting hungry.'

'That 's right. I say, though, squire; you think me a regular ruffian, don't you?'

'Yes,' said the lad quietly.

'Oh, come! That 's frank, anyhow.'

'It makes you rough and disposed to bully, living a solitary life like this, I suppose.'

'Humph!' said the manager, frowning; 'but I don't know what you mean by solitary. I have English clerks and checking-men, and a whole gang of coolies. Do you call that solitary?'

'But they are under you. I suppose you live a good deal by yourself.'

'Humph! Yes,' said the manager.

'And that, of course, makes you rough.'

'P'r'aps so. But you won't find me so rough when you get used to me. There! come along and let's see what my cook has got for us this evening. You'll have to take pot-luck. Wing will contrive something better. Come on.'

There was a grim, satisfied smile in the manager's countenance as he rose, took a great stride such as his long legs enabled him to do with ease, and clapping Stan on the shoulder, swung him round and looked him straight in the face.

'Why, youngster,' he said, 'your father must have been wonderfully like you in the phiz when he was your age; but in downright style of speaking and ways you put me wonderfully in mind of your uncle Jeffrey.'

'Do I?' said Stan quietly.

'You do; but he's a regular brick of a man.'

'That he is,' cried Stan warmly; 'but that means I'm not a bit like him there.'

'Oh, I don't know,' said the manager slowly. 'One can't say at the end of half-an-hour, but I'm beginning to think you will not be so very bad after all.'

'I hope not,' said Stan, smiling.

'I thought at first that you would be a regular

stuck-up cub. But I don't think so now. Look here, youngster; can you be honest?'

'I hope so.'

'Then tell me what you thought of me.'

'That you were a disagreeable bully.'

'Hah! That 's pretty blunt,' said the manager, frowning. 'So that 's what you think of me, is it?'

'You asked me what I thought of you, not what I think.'

'Right; so I did. Then what do you think of me?'

'That you 're going to prove not so bad as I thought.'

'Dinnee all getting velly cold, cookee say, Mistee Blunt,' said Wing in a deprecating voice; and they both started to see that the Chinaman had entered quietly upon his thick, soft boot-soles.

'All right, Wing; coming,' cried the manager shortly.—'Come along, captain; you and I are going to be great friends.'

CHAPTER VI.

'HE'S JUST LIKE A CHESTNUT.'

'I DON'T think we are going to be great friends,' said Stan to himself as he sat down that night upon the edge of his clean, comfortable-looking Chinese bed, in a perfectly plain but very clean little room adjoining that occupied by the manager. 'He was very civil, though, and took great care that I had a good dinner. He didn't seem to mind in the least my having spoken as I did.

'Perhaps I oughtn't to have spoken so,' he continued after a few minutes' thought about his position. 'I don't know, though; I didn't come here as a servant, and he was awfully bullying and rude. Phew! How hot it is!'

He rose and opened the window a little wider, to look out on the swiftly flowing river, across which the moon made a beautiful path of light, that glittered and danced and set him thinking about the home he had left, wondering the while whether father and uncle were thinking about him and how they were getting on.

'I shall write and tell them exactly how Mr Blunt treated me; but perhaps it would be only fair to wait and see how he behaves to-morrow and next

day. I couldn't complain about how he went on to-night. "Be great friends,"' he said half-aloud after a pause. 'Perhaps we may; but oh, how sleepy I am! Better leave the window as it is. I'll lie down at once. I can think just as well when I'm in bed.'

This was not true, for the only thing Stan Lynn thought was that the pillow felt quite hot. Then he was fast asleep, without so much as a dream to deal with; and the next time he was conscious, he opened his eyes in wonder and stared at the open window and the sunshiny sky, fancying he heard a sound.

'Do you hear there, squire?' came, with a sharp rapping at the boarded walls of the room. 'Time to get up. There's a tub in the next room, and plenty of cold water.'

'Yes. Thank you. All right. I won't be long.'

'Don't,' came back, in company with the sound of gurgling and splashing. 'Breakfast early. Busy day for us.' *Bur-r-r!*

'What did he mean by that?' said Stan.

The *bur-r-r!* was repeated, and then there was a rattle which explained the meaning of the peculiar noise.

'Cleaning his teeth,' muttered Stan as he sprang out of bed. He sought and found the tub and other arrangements which proved that the manager had surrounded himself with the necessaries for living like a civilised Englishman, even if he was stationed in a lonely place in a foreign land, and he was just putting the finishing touches to his dress when there was a heavy thump from a big fist on the door.

'Look sharp, Squire Lynn! I 'm going to tell them to bring in the coffee.'

'Nearly ready,' cried Stan; and a few minutes later he descended the plain board stairs, which were scrubbed to the whitest of tints.

There was a white cloth on the table, with a very English-looking breakfast spread; and plain and bare as the place was, with nothing better than Chinese mats to act as a carpet, curtain, and blind, there was the appearance of scrupulous cleanliness; and rested by a good night's sleep, and elastic of spirit in the fresh air of a beautiful morning, Stan felt ready to make the best of things if his host proved to be only bearable.

There he sat—his host—reading hard at a letter, and he made no sign for a few moments, and paid no heed to Stan's 'Good-morning!' but read on, till he suddenly exclaimed, '"Very faithfully yours, Jeffrey Lynn,"' and doubled the letter up and thrust it in his pocket.

'Morning, squire,' he continued. 'Rested? I read all the correspondence before I turned in, and I 've just run through your uncle's letter again. I say, he gives you an awfully good character.'

'Does he?' said Stan.

'Splendid. Ah! here 's old Wing. I 'm peckish; aren't you?'

'Yes; I 'm ready for my breakfast,' replied the boy as Wing entered, smiling, with a big, round lacquer tray loaded with the necessaries for a good morning meal.

'That 's right. We 'll have it, then, and afterwards see to the unloading. There isn't much consigned to

me this time. After that you'd like to see the warehouses and what we've got there, and learn who the different fellows are, before we have an hour or two in the counting-house—eh?'

'Yes; I'm ready,' said Stan, smiling, and having hard work to keep from looking wonderingly at the man who had given him so unpleasant a reception the previous evening.

'Is he a two-faced fellow,' thought Stan, 'and doing all this to put me off my guard? Why, he's as mild as'——

Stan was going to say 'mild' again, but at that moment a wild hubbub of angry voices in fierce altercation burst out, the noise coming through the open window from the direction of the wharf beyond which the junk was moored.

'Yah!' roared the manager, springing from his seat and rushing to the open window, his face completely transformed, as he roared out a whole string of expletives in the Chinese tongue. He literally raged at the disputants, whose angry shouts died out rapidly, to be suceeeded by perfect silence; and then the manager turned from the window, with his face looking very red and hot, and took his place again.

'That's the only way to deal with them,' he cried, 'when you're not near enough to knock a few heads together. You'll have to learn.'

'What was the matter?' said Stan, who felt in doubt about acquiring the accomplishment, and whose better spirits were somewhat damped by this sudden return to the previous evening's manner.

'Matter? Nothing at all. There! peg away, my lad. Make a good breakfast. I always do.

Splendid beginning for a good day's work.—What!' he roared, as there was the merest suggestion of a fresh outburst, which calmed down directly. 'Yes, you'd better tear me away from my bones! You do, and I'll turn tiger. Ah! you've thought better of it. Lucky for you!—Nice row that; just as I said, about nothing. Divide themselves into two parties; my coolies on one side, the junk's crew on the other. If I hadn't gone and yelled horrid Chinese threats at them there would have been a fight, and half the men unfit to work for the rest of the day. You'll get used to them, though, I dare say. Not bad fellows, after all, when they've got some one over them who won't let them bite, kick, and scratch like naughty children. Well, how did you leave the governors?'

'Oh, very well, considering what a scare we had the other night. I thought the villains would kill us.'

'Yes, but you wouldn't let them. I told your uncle the last time I saw him that he didn't take precautions enough, but he said he didn't believe any one would dare to attack a place so near the city. Revolvers are all very well at close quarters, but not heavy enough for a horde of savages who think nothing of fighting to the death. Got a revolver?'

'Yes,' said Stan; 'and a gun.'

'That's right. And after what you said, I suppose you know how to use the pistol?'

'I can shoot with it a little,' said Stan, colouring slightly. 'I suppose you have one?'

'What! Living out in this unprotected place? Well, rather! I'll show you my little armoury after breakfast.'

'Have you ever been attacked?'

'Not yet; but it's safe to come some time or other, so I hold myself ready. It's not quite so bad as I said last night.'

'No; I didn't think it was,' replied Stan coolly; and he was conscious that his host was watching him keenly.

'But without any nonsense, you may have to fight, my lad, if you stay here.'

'I hope not,' said Stan, breaking the top of an egg.

'So do I,' said the manager. 'I don't want my people scared, and the place knocked to pieces or burned. That's the worst of a wooden building like this. Ah! it's a risky trade, and your people deserve to make plenty of profit for their venture.'

Little more was said till the breakfast was at an end, when the *ting* of a table-gong brought Wing into the room.

'Take away,' said the manager sharply; 'and as soon as you have done, I want you to hire a boat and go up-river to stop at all the villages that were not touched at before you went away. We must do more business with the places higher up. You go and see the headmen of some of the tea-plantations there who have never dealt with us yet. Understand?'

The man nodded sharply, and the manager turned to Stan.

'Now then,' he said; 'let's look at the tools.'

He led the way into a warehouse-like place, one end of which was furnished with an arms-rack holding a dozen rifles, bayonets, and bandoliers. In a chest beside them were a dozen revolvers; and after dis-

playing these, every weapon being kept in beautiful order, a trap-door in the floor was pointed out, regularly furnished with keyhole and loose ring for lifting.

'Key hangs in my room, if you want it when I'm out,' said the manager meaningly.

'I'm not likely to want the key of the cellar,' said Stan, smiling.

'Cellar? Nonsense! That's the little magazine. Oh no! the cases down there are not cases of wine, but of cartridges for rifle and revolver.'

'Oh!' said Stan thoughtfully, for the announcement was of a very suggestive nature—one which brought up the night of the attack in Hai-Hai.

'There we are, then, if we have to fight,' said Blunt.

'With whom?' asked Stan sharply.

'Ah! who knows?' said Blunt, laughing. 'River pirates; wandering bands of Chinese robbers; disbanded soldiers of the Government; anybody. China's a big country, my lad, and abominably governed, but a splendid land all the same, teeming with a most hard-working, industrious population, eager to engage in trade, and on the whole good, honest folk who like dealing with us, and are free from prejudices, excepting that they look upon us as a set of ignorant barbarians—foreign devils, as they call us. But it doesn't matter much. We know better—eh?'

'Of course,' said Stan, laughing. 'But you have a good many Chinese at work for you here; don't you ever feel afraid of them rising against you and the English clerks?'

'One way and another, there are about ten of them to one of us; and as in the case of a row the whole countryside would take part with them, you might say they would be a hundred or a thousand to one against us and still be within bounds.'

'It seems very risky,' said Stan thoughtfully; 'and of course you and the clerks dread a rising against you.'

'Against us, you ought to say now, my lad,' said Blunt, smiling. 'But we are not a bit afraid, and when you have been here a few months you won't be either.'

Stan flushed a little, and said hurriedly:

'Of course, it is excusable for me to feel a bit nervous at first. You see, I had such a nasty experience the other night.'

'To be sure,' said Blunt. 'And mind, I don't say but what we live in a constant state of alarm about an attack like that, but not of our own people. They wouldn't go against us.'

'Why?' said Stan.

'Because the round, smooth-faced beggars like me.'

The thought of what he had heard from Wing, and learnt from his own observation of the manager, had such a perplexing effect upon the lad that his countenance assumed an aspect of so ludicrous a nature that Blunt burst into a roar of laughter.

'I see,' he cried; 'you can't digest that. It doesn't fit with my roaring and shouting at them just now? Well, it doesn't seem to, but it does. You'll see. You'll soon find out that the men all like me very much, and I believe that if we were

in great trouble they'd fight to the death for me—to a man. Like to know why?'

'Of course,' said Stan.

'Well, then, I'll tell you. I'm master, king, magistrate, doctor, everything to them. They come to me about their quarrels and their ailments; to get their money, and then bank it with me; and the reason I believe in them and they believe in me is because I am just as fair as in me lies. If I find a man skulking and kick him, do you think the others side with him?'

'I should expect them to,' said Stan.

'Then you're wrong. They roar with laughter, and enjoy seeing their fellow punished. They're shrewd enough, and know that the idler is putting his share of work upon them. If there's a quarrel amongst them they come to me to settle it. If a man's sick he comes to me, and I try to set him right. Nurse him up sometimes. When they want a treat they come to me to draw out part of their earnings that I have banked for them. Bah! I'm not going to preach a sermon about what I do. I'm just to them, I tell you, and they know it. I trust them, and they trust me. Come along; let's go and see how they're getting on with the unloading. Let's go in here, though, first.'

He led the way by stacks of bales and piles of tea-chests, all neatly arranged like a wall—a great cube built up from floor to ceiling—and passing through an opening, went down a narrow alley in the great store-room, with a wall of half-chests built up on either side, and entered an open doorway to where half-a-dozen clerks and warehousemen were

busy. The former were making out bills of lading and entries in books, the latter sampling teas—one with little piles of the dried leaves in cardboard trays, which he was testing in rotation; while another sat at a table upon which was a copper contrivance standing upon a slab of granite, with a glowing charcoal fire burning beneath a bright urn, the fumes and steam being carried off by a little metal tube funnel which passed out through the top of an open chimney.

Right and left of this employee was a row of little earthenware Chinese teapots, and as many cups and saucers; the pots being labelled as they were used with cards attached to the handles, and marked with letters and numbers corresponding with those on the little cardboard trays containing the dried tea.

'Mr Stanley Lynn, gentlemen,' said the manager sharply. 'He has come in his uncle's place to stay with us for a time.'

The introduction was brief, and then the lad was hurried out on to the wharf, where the manager made his appearance suddenly. His presence acted like a stimulus, setting every one working at a double rate of speed, in spite of the scorching sun, which was beginning to glow with so much fervour that the strange gum used to caulk the seams of the great junk in process of being unloaded began to ooze out and form brown globules like little tadpoles with tails.

Everything was new and interesting to Stan, and the day passed very quickly, the manager seeming eager to explain everything to his new colleague; and, saving when now and then he burst out into

fierce invectives against offending coolies and the *tindal* of the junk, he was mildness itself.

Stan could hardly believe it when closing-time came and the men ceased work.

'Didn't think it was so late?' said Blunt, laughing.

'No; the time has gone like lightning.'

'But don't you want your dinner?'

'No,' said Stan promptly; 'I don't feel—— Yes, I do,' he cried. 'I didn't till you mentioned it.'

'Shows that you have been interested, my lad. There! come along; let's have a wash and brush up, and then we'll see what the cook has for us. I'm afraid you'll have to put up with a makeshift meal again, as Wing is on the wing, as one may say, and I don't expect him back till to-morrow night, for he has a good way to go, and the boat will sail slowly against stream. When he comes back with his report, I expect it will be necessary for me to go up and see some of the little native growers. We might take our guns and get a bit of sport among the snipes in the paddy-fields; what do you say?'

'I shall be delighted,' cried Stan eagerly.

'Like big-game shooting?' said the manager carelessly, but with a twinkle in his observant eye.

'I never had the chance to try,' replied Stan; 'and I'm no hand at all with a gun. I had two days' rabbit-shooting in England just before I came away; that's all.'

'Hit any of the rabbits?'

'Five.'

'Out of how many shots?'

'About twenty,' said the lad, colouring; 'but, you see, I've had no practice.'

'You'll get plenty here, and I'll teach you the knack of bringing down snipe.'

'But you said something about big game,' said Stan hesitatingly. 'What did you mean—pheasants—turkeys?'

'Pheasants—turkeys!' cried the manager scornfully. 'There are plenty of pheasants in the woods, but I mean tigers.'

'Tigers?'

'Yes, my lad, tigers; hungry savages who carry off a poor Chinese labourer working in the fields now and then. There! wait a bit, and we'll mix up a bit of sport with our work.'

That night Stan went to his bedroom and stood looking at the moon silvering the river, thinking that perhaps after all he might end by being good friends with the manager.

'He's just like a chestnut,' thought the boy—'all sharp, prickly husk outside; good, rich brown skin under the husk; and inside all hard, firm, sweet nut. I say, it doesn't do to judge any one at first sight. I wonder what he thinks of me. I hope he likes me, but I'm afraid not, for he seems disposed to sneer at me now and then.'

CHAPTER VII.

'YOU 'LL SOON LEARN YOUR LESSON.'

IT seemed to be directly after he had lain down that the thumping at the wooden partition-wall came again, and Stan leapt out of bed to hurry to his bath.

Then came a friendly meeting and breakfast, with quite a procession of boats, *nagas* and *sampans*, with an occasional junk, going up and down the river heavily laden with produce, or returning to the plantations bordering the river-bight.

Breakfast ended, Blunt proposed another walk through the warehouses to begin marking off the stock that was to form part of the return cargo in the loading up of the vessel by which Stan had come.

'I want you to get to be at home with all these things,' said the manager quietly, 'so that I can leave you in charge while I run up the river now and then on such a journey as I have sent Wing upon this time. By the way, I wonder whether he 'll be back to-day?'

Stan shook his head.

'What makes you think not?'

'I did not mean that,' said Stan quickly. 'I was

thinking that it will be some time before I am fit to trust with such an important charge as you say.'

'Oh, I don't know, Mr Modesty. It all depends upon whether you take an interest in the work,' replied Blunt. 'There! come along; you 'll soon learn your lesson, I dare say.'

'I shall try hard,' said Stan gravely. 'Everything here is so interesting!'

'Glad you find it so, youngster. For my part, it took a precious lot of resolution to make me stick to the work as I have done. My word! it has been dull and lonely sometimes. It has quite spoiled my temper. I might tell you that I was a nice, pleasant, mild-speaking young fellow like you when I was your age, but you wouldn't believe it,' said the manager, with a laugh.

'No, I don't think I should,' said Stan as they crossed an open enclosure and entered the warehouse, where the men were busy arranging the packages brought up the river by the *tindal's* boat.

The manager began giving his orders for a fresh arrangement of certain of the packages, while Stan stood looking on, an opening just in front giving him a good view of all that was being done.

That day went like magic, and the following one too; everything was so fresh and animated, so full of interest; while when Blunt was not falling foul of some of the men, or, as one of his principal over-lookers—a bluff, straightforward, manly fellow, who informed the new-comer that his name was Lawrence and his duties that of a Jack-of-all-trades—expressed it to Stan, in a state of eruption, the lad found him most agreeable, and always willing to explain anything.

Stan thanked Blunt in the evening for the trouble he was taking to make him fully acquainted with the routine of the business.

'Humph!' he grunted, with a curiously grim smile; 'that 's just like me. I always was an idiot.'

Stan stared.

'I don't understand you,' he said.

'I thought I talked plainly enough,' was the reply. 'I say that 's just like me, to be such an idiot as to tell you everything.'

'Why?' said Stan quietly.

'Because I 'm showing you all about the management of the men that it has taken me much study and patience to acquire.'

'I 'm sure it must have,' said Stan eagerly.

'Well, then, am I not a donkey to teach you till you know as much as I do?'

'Certainly not,' said Stan warmly.

'Then I think I am, my fine fellow; but we will not quarrel about it.'

'No; for one can't,' said Stan, laughing, 'and I shall not.'

'Nor I, my lad, but I shall think a great deal; but it 's weak all the same. As soon as I have made you fit to manage here, I shall be packed off and you 'll be pitchforked into my post.'

'I don't think it is likely that my father would put an inexperienced boy to perform the duties of one like you,' said Stan quietly; 'and I 'm sure neither father nor uncle would behave unfairly to any one.'

'Good boy!' said the manager sharply, and with one of his half-mocking smiles. 'Always stick up

for your own people. But, to be fair, I think just the same as yourself. They wouldn't, and I know them better than you do. But to change the conversation. Look here; as soon as old Wing comes back, I 'm going to send him right up the country among our trading people upon another expedition. You have to learn, and I 've been thinking that you may as well begin to pick up business and the knowledge of the people at once. What do you say to going up the river lands and gardens along with him ?'

'I should like it,' said Stan. 'But I 'm afraid that I should be no use to him. What should I have to do ?'

'Nothing,' said the manager, laughing. 'Only keep your eyes open. You could do that ?'

'Oh yes, I could do that,' replied Stan.

'Wing would do the judging of the crops. One does not want to buy tea blindfold.'

'I thought you bought it by tasting.'

'Yes; but we look at it first. That 's settled, then. I tell you what you shall do: sail up the river to the extreme of your journey, and come back overland so as to visit some of the plantations right away from the stream.'

'And stop at hotels of a night ?'

'Certainly. Capital plan,' said the manager dryly, 'if you can find them.'

'I meant inns, of course,' said Stan, flushing.

'And I shouldn't advise that. They would not be comfortable. No, no,' added the manager, with a laugh; 'you made a mistake, and I began to banter. You will find some of our customers hospitable

enough. It is only the ignorant common people who are objectionable.'

'And the pirates,' cried Stan, smiling.

'Oh yes, they're bad enough,' said Blunt. 'The difficulty is to tell which are pirates and which are not. You see, there are so many unemployed or discharged soldiers about. They get no pay, they've no fighting to do, and they must live, so a great number of them become regular banditti, ready to rob and murder.'

'This seems a pleasant country,' said Stan.

'Very, if you don't know your way about. But you are not nervous, are you?'

'What! about going up the country? Not at all.'

'That's right. Make your preparations, then, just as slight as you can, and it will make a pleasant trip, in which you will have a good view of a beautiful land, and learn a good deal about the people.'

The next morning, to Stan's surprise, he found that a fresh boat was moored to the wharf—one that resembled a miniature junk—a boat manned by three or four men, and just large enough to display a good cabin aft, with windows and sleeping accommodation, while the crew had an enclosure forward to themselves.

'The boss's boat,' said the chief warehouseman, Lawrence, as he saw the lad examining the outside. 'Nice, comfortable boat for up-river work. Mr Blunt goes up in her sometimes to visit the plantations. Our man Wing came back in her during the night.'

'Oh, has he come back?' cried Stan eagerly.

The words had hardly passed his lips before the pleasant, smiling face of Wing appeared, as he slid

back a window and came out of the cabin, looking particularly neat and clean in his blue frock and white trousers, and ready to salute his young master most deferentially.

'Morning, Mr Lynn,' came the next minute in the manager's harsh voice. 'So you 're beforehand with me. Have you arranged with Wing?'

'No; of course not,' was the reply. 'I have not said a word.'

'That 's right.—Here, Wing!'

The Chinaman stepped on to the wharf, and a short conversation ensued, during which Stan stepped forward with Lawrence, who chatted with him about the boat and its capabilities.

'Very little room,' he said; 'but there are arrangements for cooking, and any one could spend a month in her up the river very comfortably.'

'Wing,' shouted the manager, 'we 've done our business, so we may as well chat over the arrangements for your start.'

'Yes. When will it be?' asked Stan.

'The sooner the better. Wing here is always ready. I should suggest an early dinner, and then making a start so as to get as high up the river as you can before night.'

Wing smiled assent, and then played the part of captain by leading the way on board and doing the honours of the boat.

After this there was a little discussion about stores, which the Chinaman was ordered to obtain, and in half-an-hour Stan found himself within measurable distance of making a start. That afternoon there was a hearty send-off, and Stan was waving his cap

in answer to the cheers of the party gathered upon the wharf, while the light boat glided along in obedience to the action of its tall, narrow matting sail, the big building rapidly beginning to look dwarfed; while as soon as the Chinese boatmen had got their sails to draw well they squatted down in the forepart of the boat, one keeping a lookout, and their chief, aft behind the cabin, holding the long steering-oar.

Stan had the main deck (if a portion of the boat in front of the cabin door that had no deck could be so called) all to himself, for Wing was inside, evidently intent upon making his arrangements for his young chief perfect before it was time for the evening meal.

The space was very small, but there was plenty to be seen, and a movement or two on the part of one of the boatmen squatting forward with an earthen pot between his knees taught the lad that he was looking down at the kitchen, and also that the earthen pot was the range—the man, who was arranging some scraps of charcoal in a little basket, being evidently the cook—while soon after the men were doing feats with chopsticks in getting rice into their mouths.

Stan had had some experience of Wing's catering while on the up-river journey coming from the port, and had seen the man play what seemed to be conjuring tricks with a melon-shaped piece of chinaware which was plaited all over with bamboo basket-work.

This came out of its basket jacket, and disgorged cups, saucers, and a sugar-basin, before turning into a teapot; and a glance at another squarish box with

rounded angles was very suggestive of its being fitted up for dinner use, as was afterwards proved.

All in good time, as they glided onward to the glowing west, Stan saw as if in rapid succession, so great was the novelty, his own tea made ready, the men forward seated round a steaming heap of rice, his own supper prepared, and then the night coming on as they made for a wooded part of the bank, off which the sails were lowered and the boat moored; and soon after all was painfully still, only the faint gurgling of the water breaking the silence as it rippled beneath the bows. Then, almost before the lad could realise his position, all was dark beneath the glistening stars, and he felt ready to ask himself whether it was true that he, who used to watch the stars out of the dormitory windows of his school in far-away England, could be now in such a helpless position, right away there on the swift waters of one of the great rivers of the mighty Chinese Empire.

'It doesn't seem real,' he said. 'I could almost fancy that it was all a dream.'

He felt the same soon after, when, for want of something to relieve the monotony of his position, he went into the cabin and lay down on the stuffed bamboo shelf which formed his bed.

'Suppose one of the great dragon-eyed junks coming down the river should run us down,' he thought, after lying awake for some time.

And then he began to think of the consequences, and whether he could manage to reach the surface and strike out for the shore.

Next he began to think of his father and Uncle Jeff; then of the manager, who did not seem such

a bad fellow after all; then of himself and his lonely position; and then of Wing, who gave him a broad hint that he was sharing his cabin. Lastly, the lad began to think of nothing at all, not even the huge forces of the mighty river, for a listener would have come to the conclusion that he was trying to mock the remarks made by Wing.

Then it seemed to the lad that it was only a few minutes since he lay down in the darkness.

But it could not have been, for all at once something in a great reed-bed cried 'Quack, quack!'

And Stan knew that it was once more morning, with the sun shining brightly, and the boat gliding swiftly up the stream; the men being clever enough in their management, in spite of their stupid looks, and steering close inshore where the current was slack.

CHAPTER VIII.

'COME CUTTEE HEAD OFF.'

THE night's rest had chased away all the dull feelings that had troubled Stan, and he woke up bright, elastic, and eager for the adventures of the day. Look where he would on either shore, everything was attractive. The country was highly cultivated, and dotted with farms and dwellings belonging to what seemed to be a large and peaceable population.

But his wondering gaze was soon checked by Wing, who came out of the cabin smiling, with the announcement that 'bleakfas'' was ready—an announcement as pleasant in the confines of Asia as in homely Britain; and, to the lad's delight, he found everything quite as civilised and good.

Wing played the part of body-servant as ably as that of agent at the *hong;* and after the meal was over, and the lad had returned outside to watch the glorious panorama spread on either side of the river, his guide came deprecatingly behind him rubbing his hands.

'Young Lynn wantee Wing?' he asked.

'Yes; tell me,' said Stan, 'how far have we to go up the river?'

'Velly long way,' replied the Chinaman, holding

up his left hand with the digits spread out, and using his right index-finger for a pointer as he counted, 'One, two, flee, fow, fi'. P'l'ap sick if wind no blow.'

'And is it all beautiful?'

'Yes; allee velly beautiful. Wing countly velly fine place.'

'But are we going to sail right on up the river like this?' asked Stan.

'Yes. 'Top many time. Buy cake—buy egg—buy fluit—buy duck—buy chicken—buy lil pig. Plenty good to eat. Got lice, tea, suga'. You likee have gun shoot duck?'

'No,' said Stan; 'there's too much to look at without bothering about a gun.'

'You likee ketchee fishee? Boy get line leady, put bait hook, young Lynn ketchee fish? Velly good eat.'

'Not to-day,' replied Stan. 'I want to use my eyes.'

'Yes; velly good. Young Lynn use long eyes.'

And before the lad had half-grasped the man's meaning, Wing had shuffled back into the cabin, to return directly with his young master's black leather binocular-case.

'Wing load long eyes—nocklah—leady to shoot?'

'Not yet,' said Stan, smiling, as he took the case, and then seated himself in a squeaking cane chair placed ready for his use, and sat back to continue watching what at times looked to him like so much beautifully painted china on a large scale.

Finding that his services were not required, Wing settled himself down upon a stool just inside the

cabin entrance, and at once became busy without attracting his young master's notice, till the boat came abreast of a beautifully shaped pagoda, evidently built with blue and white tiles, and having a marvellously striking effect in the bright sunshine, as it rose from a verdant gorge half-way up a rugged mountain-side whose slope ran steeply down to the river, which bathed its rocky foot.

'What a landmark!' thought Stan. 'If one were lost, how easy it would be to look out for that tall temple and make for it!'

The glittering tiers of glazed earthenware rose one above the other, each with its wavy, puckered eaves and points bearing little bells, the topmost stories looking as if the builders had possessed ambitious ideas of making the highest pinnacle pierce the soft blue sky; and as the new-comer kept his admiring eyes fixed upon the beautiful work, the boat glided on, forcing him to turn his head a little more and a little more, till it was wrenched round so much that Wing began to appear at the left-hand corners of his eyes, and interested the lad so much by the busy interest he took in his work that Stan's gaze became gradually transferred from the temple to the man, who went on with what he was about in profound ignorance of being observed.

It was something fresh to Stan, who more than ever realised the fact that, in spite of being heavy and plain of feature, Wing was a bit of a buck in his way, and one who took great pains to impress upon the common coolies with whom he came in contact that he belonged to a higher grade of native—one of a class who never dreamed of defiling their hands with

hard work, and kept up at great trouble so many signs, in the shape of finger-nails, of their being head and not hand craftsmen.

When Stan first caught sight of him, Wing was very carefully taking off what looked like a wooden thimble, which had been formed by scraping and filing down a suitable portion of a joint of bamboo; and as this thimble-like piece was removed, the man again laid bare a long, curved finger-nail, whose point, carefully polished and smoothed, was quite an inch above the quick, and evidently 'still growing.'

'What silly nonsense!' thought Stan. 'What an absurd idea! Why, if he caught that nail in anything it would break down and become a painful hang-nail.'

But it soon became evident that Wing did not mean to break down that nail, for after a certain amount of scraping and polishing it was carefully covered with its thimble-like sheath, before the index-finger on his left hand was uncovered to go through the same process as its fellow.

As Stan watched he became aware of the fact that the left middle-finger nail had met with a mishap, having in all probability been broken right down, and was now being nursed up again to an aristocratic height.

All at once the man raised his eyes as if to see how his young master was getting on, and started as he saw that he was being watched.

'Are we likely to see any pirates up the river here?' said Stan quietly.

The man shook his head.

'Wing no tell,' he said gravely as he began to

cover up his much-petted nails. 'P'l'aps many bad man—p'l'aps not none 'tall. Plenty pilate evely-wheah. Plenty bad soljee. Wing hope nevah see none no mo'. Velly glad leave boat and begin walk back. Plenty pilate on livah; plenty bad soljee way flom livah.'

'Then the discharged soldiers are worse than the pirates, Wing?' said Stan, smiling.

'Not laugh at,' said the man solemnly. 'Allee dleadful bad man. Killee people and takee evely-thing away. Lun fass?'

'What do you mean—can I run fast?'

'Yes; lun velly fass?'

'Yes; I think so. Do you think we shall have to run away from some of these men?'

'Yes. Lun away and hide.'

'Oh, I suppose I could run well enough,' replied Stan; 'but of course I don't want to.'

'No; Wing don't want lun away, but pilate—soljee makee him. Velly fass; come cuttee head off.'

'This is pleasant!' thought Stan. 'It sounds like jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire.'

The consequence of this conversation was that whenever Stan could tear his eyes from the beauty and novelty of the shore on either side he was narrowly scanning the various vessels which came into sight, the greater part being small sailing-boats. But every now and then in the course of the day the tall matting sails of some towering junk would come gliding round a bend, partially hidden, perhaps, by the trees which fringed the banks; and as soon as this was seen, Stan noted that there was a little stir

among the quiet, placid-looking boatmen, who began to whisper among themselves. Then, if Wing had not seen the stranger, one of them moved to where he stood and drew his attention to the distant object.

The guide seemed to be gifted with wonderfully powerful sight, which he generally used with the result that every man was placed at his ease at once. But not always. To use a nautical phrase, Wing was not upon every occasion satisfied with the cut of the stranger's jib, and upon these occasions he turned to his young master.

'Young Lynn lettee Wing look flou' double eye-glass?'

The binocular was handed at once, and after a great deal of focussing, handed back.

'No pilate. Tea-boat. Allee good man.'

Or he might speak with a greater tone of reverence as he shaded his eyes:

'Big junk muchee fullee silk. Wing think junk go down whalf see Misteh Blunt.'

'Not enemies, then?' said Stan.

'No; velly good fliend.'

'But there are the big eyes painted on each side of the bows.'

'Yes,' said Wing, smiling; 'but good boat. No cally stink-pot to flow on boat and set fi'. No big bang gong and lot fighting-man all ovah. No. That velly good boat, and not hu't people. Wing tell when he sees bad boat. Lun away then.'

'On shore?'

'Tly go down livah get away. Pilate come too fass. Lun to side and go light away.'

'But what will become of the boat?' asked Stan.

'Pilate send man. Take allee good thing. Set fi'.'

'Mr Blunt would not like that.'

'No. Velly angly. Kick up big low and say Wing gleat fool.'

'And what would you say?' asked Stan.

'Say velly solly. Gleat pity lose nice topside boat b'long Blunt.'

'Of course.'

'But much gleat pity let pilate man choppee off Wing head and all men head. Can makee nicee boat again; can'tee makee velly good boatman.'

Stan agreed that this was a perfectly sound argument, and during the rest of the little voyage up the river he always felt greatly relieved when his guide was able to announce that the boats they passed were men of peace and not men-o'-war.

But as day succeeded day in lovely weather, and the journey continued through a glorious country, the bugbear pirates died out of the lad's thoughts; and on the last evening, when Wing announced that they would land at a big city in the morning, and leave the boat to go back to the *hong*, Stan was ready to believe that his guide had been playing alarmist a great deal more than was necessary, and told him so.

But Wing shook his head.

'No,' he said; 'pilate velly bad sometime.'

'But we shall find the land journey no worse—there will be no discharged soldiers wandering about ready to interfere with us?'

'Wing hope allee gone, but can'tee tell. Plenty fliend people heah. Tell Wing when soljee come. Young Lynn and Wing lun away.'

CHAPTER IX.

'A FIERCE STRUGGLE ENSUED.'

TAN altered his opinion the next day when they reached a busy city built on both sides of the river, for Wing gave him a quiet hint to look, and upon turning, the lad found that they were gliding by a towering junk whose deck swarmed with villainous-looking men all well armed, while at intervals they passed four more.

'Allee bad,' whispered Wing. 'No lookee; pletend can't see pilate ship.'

Five more were passed, all of which were given a bad character; but their occupants were lying about, smoking and sleeping, eating and drinking; and being close up to the quays and warehouses of the teeming city, the men were upon their best behaviour, and not disposed to seize and plunder such small fry as the little boat from the *hong*.

Hence it was that Stan's *sampan* remained untouched, and reached the disembarking place in safety.

Here, evidently so as not to draw attention to his young chief, Wing slung a few necessaries, scale fashion, at either end of a bamboo, balanced his load across his left shoulder, and after giving the boatmen

a few instructions which led to their setting off at once on the return journey, he led Stan away from the riverside, right into the busy part of the city, where no notice was taken of them. A short time after the lad found himself at the house of one of the Chinese merchants, who gave him a warm welcome, and talked with him in pidgin-English about his father and uncle.

Stan noticed that he exhibited no little inquisitiveness about his further proceedings, shaking his head and looking very solemn as he hinted that the country was in a very disturbed state.

'But Mr Wing will know how to take care,' he said. 'He will know, too, that the farther you keep from the river the less likely you are to meet with pirates or wandering bands of soldiers. You must take care.'

Wing evidently meant to take care, for that evening, after dark, he laid his hand upon Stan's shoulder and drew him away from the window.

'Too many bad man,' he said, directing the lad's attention to the rough-looking armed people lounging about the street. 'See young Lynn and say, "Foleign devil. What want heah?" No look out window. Go to bed. Sleep.'

Stan laughed at the ultra-precautions taken, but obeyed, and for want of something to occupy himself, lay down quite early, to listen to the shuffling of feet and the loud conversation going on below his window, thinking the while that he would most likely lie awake all night. But before he could make an effort to combat the drowsiness that had seized upon him he was fast asleep, and the next

thing he knew was that Wing was shaking his arm.

'What is it?' he cried. 'Coming to bed?'

'Get-up time,' replied the Chinaman. 'Mollow molning. Come 'long.'

'But'—— began Stan. He said no more, his mouth stretching wide in a portentous yawn; and, still half-asleep, he suffered himself to be led out of the house and along a dark, uneven street, the air of which felt chilly, as if the morning was close at hand.

Twice over he began to question Wing, but received a hurried whisper to be silent, and by degrees it dawned upon him that their land journey had commenced, and that Wing was nervously anxious lest their departure should become known.

'Soljees,' he whispered, and put his hand to his lips.

'Why, there's not a soul about,' said Stan to himself, feeling sleepy, and out of temper to a degree that made him ready to quarrel with his guide for taking such unnecessary precautions.

But he remained silent, and trudged on close behind his companion, stumbling every now and then in the darkness, and longing the while for the coming of broad daylight, so that he could avoid the rough stones and mud-holes which seemed to be always in his way.

He was surprised, too, at the extent of the city, for no sooner was one devious street passed than they plunged into another, their wanderings lasting for what must have been close upon half-an-hour, before they plunged into a narrower passage than ever—one where the overhanging eaves on either side seemed to nearly touch—while right in front a huge

wall towered up, looking jetty black, all but a square patch on a level with their feet.

'Why, this must be a big house into which we are going,' he thought.

But the idea had no sooner crossed his mind than he felt his arm gripped, and Wing checked him so suddenly that he came heavily against his guide's chest.

'What 's the matter ?' whispered Stan.

'St ! Big gate. Plentee soljee fass sleepee,' whispered Wing. 'Now come 'long, quick, quick.'

He slipped his hand down to the lad's waist as he spoke, and drew him along past where Stan dimly made out a group of men sitting and lying upon a big bench beneath a great shadowy house.

There was no time to see more before they were out on the other side, with the great building reared up in the gloom behind them, and a feeling of freedom as of an open space in front.

So great a sense of relief came over the lad that he felt bound to speak; but certain sounds behind checked him once more, and he turned cold at the proximity of the danger they had escaped.

For a deep, gruff voice growled out something he could not interpret, and this was replied to by another voice, evidently that of a man newly aroused from sleep.

The brief conversation was carried on angrily, and interrupted again and again as if the speakers kept listening.

This was proved to Stan by the firm pressure of Wing's hand, and the twitches it kept on giving as he stood otherwise quite motionless.

Stan's heart beat till a feeling of suffocation began to oppress him, while with straining eyes he tried to penetrate the dark shadows behind. At last, however, the talking ceased, and he felt the hand which Wing had at liberty pressing upon the top of his head as if to make him stoop down. Grasping his guide's wishes, he bent low, and immediately felt himself drawn onward, the pair stealing along softly in the darkness as silently as possible, and as quickly, for before they had gone many yards Stan was conscious of the fact that there was a long, pale line of light right ahead, and that it was not so dark; for on glancing over his shoulder he could dimly see the gate through which they had come, a huge structure with curving roof and vast eaves, dominating a high wall which went off into the darkness right and left.

'Velly neah ketchee ketchee,' said Wing, with a sigh of relief.

'But suppose they had caught us,' said Stan; 'I am an English subject, and you are my attendant. They dared not have kept us.'

Wing uttered a funny little squeak.

'Eh?' he cried. 'Wheah Englis' sailoh? No Englis' man-o'-wha, and big gun go bang two time. Chinaman velly much aflaid when Englis' soljee—sailoh heah. Not heah now; Chinaman laugh; say, "Don't ca'e mandalin button." Chinese soljee ketchee young Lynn—Wing. Say, "Don't ca'e nobody." Puttee in plison. P'l'aps nevah come out again. Velly bad.'

'Ah, well! they didn't see us,' said Stan, 'so let's go on faster.'

'Yes; go fastee now. Go long way, have bleakfast. Don'tee want see soljee. Plentee don't ca'e lobbah. Steal dollah. Takee young Lynn gold watch. Velly bad, wicked man.'

'We shan't meet any of them now, I suppose?' said Stan as he gave an uneasy look round at the fast-broadening dawn.

'Wing no know. Velly likely bad soljee come. Velly likely no bad soljee come. Allee same pilate on livah. Don't know quite safe till get home. Wing velly glad get home to *hong*. S'pose get home and no young Lynn. Misteh Blunt say, "Where young Lynn?" and Wing say been gone lose young Lynn. Misteh Blunt call Wing dleadful name. Nea'ly kill Wing.'

'Then you must not lose me, Wing.'

'No; no must lose young Lynn. Takee gleat ca'e young Lynn.'

He nodded and smiled as he hurried his companion along, till the great gateway began to grow small in the distance, and the glazed tiles of the roof glittered and flashed and grew confused; while in the distance, far down the rough track, a temple seemed to rise out of a clump of trees, at whose edge a few humble-looking houses appeared beyond where the regularity of the enclosures told of cultivation.

A short time later Wing's next words sent a thrill of satisfaction through Stan, for he laughed, chuckled, and rubbed his hands.

'Good bleakfast,' he said. 'Plenty eat, plenty tea. Wing know allee people.'

Before they had gone much farther Stan was in possession of the information that the place they

were approaching was a large tea-farm, with its warehouses, and sheds where tea-chests were made; and that for a long time past the produce of this farm had been sent down regularly to the *hong* by one or other of the trading-junks that bore the up-country produce to the stores of the foreign merchants.

This was interesting enough, and suggestive of the journey now becoming perfectly peaceful. But Stan's main ideas at this time were in connection with the expected meal, so that plenty of energy was brought to bear to get over the intervening distance; while, to make matters better, it soon became evident that they were seen. People came out to stand in the sunshine, shading their eyes and watching the coming visitors. Wing's signals were answered, and a couple of young men came running and recognised the guide, when the visitors were eagerly welcomed to join the morning meal that had been prepared.

The troubles of the early morning were soon forgotten, while, but for the strangeness of his surroundings, there were moments when Stan could have fancied that he was enjoying the hospitality of some farmer's family thousands of miles away in old Devon. But the satisfaction was only short-lived, for the meal was hardly at an end before the door and windows were darkened prior to being thrown open by a crowd of rough-looking men bearing clumsy weapons.

Wing was seated with his back to the door, and at first saw nothing, for Stan, who had the fresh-comers in full view, felt that the best plan would be to sit perfectly calm and unconcerned.

And this he did till Wing, startled by the darkening

of the window, looked quickly round and sprang to his feet.

'Lun! lun!' he whispered sharply to his young charge; and catching at his wrist, he tried to drag him towards the door in the back of the place.

He was too late.

A rush was made by the rough-looking soldiers, several of whom literally pounced upon Stan, hurling him down to the floor; and as he, naturally enough, made a brave dash for liberty, a fierce struggle ensued, in which the lad had ample proof of the futility of a half-grown boy trying to resist the united efforts of half-a-dozen heavily built men.

Of course, the struggle did not last many minutes before Stan found himself upon the earthen floor of the Chinese house, with four men seated upon him, leaving him hard work to get his breath, as he stared wildly round to see how his companion had fared.

But he looked in vain, for in the noise and confusion Wing had managed to get behind some of the people of the house, who willingly helped him to pass outside, leaving Stan to his fate.

'A coward!' muttered the boy as soon as he had satisfied himself that Wing had gone.

'No,' he added after a few moments' thought; 'he couldn't help it, poor fellow! I know: he has escaped. He 'll go down the river to warn Mr Blunt, and he 'll get help from the port. They 'll send men up from one of the ships to get me set at liberty. For these people will not dare to hurt me. I 'll be bound to say that Mr Blunt will soon get to know, and if these scoundrels are not punished severely for this it is strange to me.'

CHAPTER X.

'COWARDLY BRUTES!'

STAN had the stout old tea-farmer who owned the place to thank for the rescue from his extremely awkward position. For, making tremendous use of his tongue, in words which, if interpreted, undoubtedly would have proved to mean, 'Let the lad get up, you brutes; can't you see that you are nearly stifling him?' the farmer supplemented his fierce verbal abuse with blows and thrusts which, in spite of being armed, the invaders made no attempt to resist. They gave way good-humouredly enough, evidently being quite satisfied with their capture; and after taking the precaution to station a spearman at each door and window, they allowed Stan to rise, and then bound him hand and foot to the framework of a cane chair, which they planted full in sight in the middle of the room, before crowding to the well-spread table and making a raid upon the food.

This evoked another torrent of abuse, in which the farmer was stoutly aided by two sturdy young fellows—apparently his sons—his fat wife, and a couple of men.

The farmer seemed to be blessed with a grand vocabulary, and to be well skilled in giving volleys

of abuse; but he might have spared his breath for all the effect his words had upon Stan's captors. They listened calmly enough, and as the boy looked on it seemed to him that all the bullying did was to give the rough party of soldiers an excellent appetite. In fact, the more the farmer raved the more they ate and gave orders for the big teapot to be filled; while, when the farmer ceased shouting, the visitors ceased eating and took out their pipes to a man.

A few minutes later the table had been cleared by the tea-farmer's people, and a couple of the biggest soldiers rose at an order from their leader, seized the chair by its two sides, and then heaved together, lifting it on high and dropping it upon the table, where Stan had the misery of finding himself the observed of all observers; being treated as a newly captured foreign devil planted there for inspection, every man staring hard after precisely the stupid, open-mouthed fashion of some of our own country louts.

Now and then a remark would be passed by some smoker which brought the angry blood to the lad's cheeks; for, though not to be exactly interpreted, its meaning was evidently derisive, and afforded amusement to the lookers-on at Stan's expense.

'Cowardly brutes!' he muttered; and that was the only satisfaction he could get, save that of indulging in hopes that Wing was well on his way to the big city, where he would be sure to get into communication with some one or other of the principal traders, and from them obtain an audience with the chief mandarin, who, as a Government official, would feel himself bound to interfere on

behalf of the young Englishman who had been seized.

And so a couple of hours dragged slowly along, at the end of which time the prisoner began to come to the conclusion that he had allowed Wing time to get to the river city, and that when he had patiently waited another two hours Wing would have fulfilled his mission and be on his way back with some of the mandarin's guards.

But, to his dismay, Stan found that he was not to wait there till Wing returned; for all at once the man in command of the rough soldiery growled out an order, which resulted in a clumsy tumbling together of the party and the production of two very large, thick bamboo poles.

These were laid right in front of the farm-house, and then the chair was seized and lifted down, to be carried out to where the bamboos lay, these being passed between the legs and there lashed.

'Am I to be turned into a Guy Fawkes?' muttered Stan angrily, as he gave himself a wrench in his seat to try and loosen his bandages.

But the result was vile. The captain of the party uttered a furious growl and made-believe to draw his sword, while a couple of his men seized the prisoner, holding him down fast, and a third dropped upon his knees and proceeded to tighten the thongs with such savage violence that the pain turned the lad faint, making him hang back quite lax, with the great drops of perspiration gathering on his forehead.

It was while everything seemed to be sailing

round him that he became conscious of a peculiar, shaking motion which sharpened the pain he suffered. But the sickening sensation passed off, and he became fully conscious, to his great disgust, that he was being made the principal figure—carried shoulder-high as he was—in a triumphal procession on its way, so far as he could judge, back towards the great gate, which he could dimly see towering up in the distance.

They were right out in the country, with rice-fields and plantations in all directions, so that the inhabitants were scarce; but the people of the farm closed up as near as his captors would allow, and as they tramped slowly along, Stan from his elevated, swaying perch could see men at a distance throwing down the tools with which they were working, and trotting along with their tails bobbing between their shoulders, some to overtake, others to meet, and all to join in the procession.

'Why, they treat it as if it were some show—the wretches!' said Stan to himself. 'Ugh! How I should like to give it to some of them! Grinning at me! Yes, actually grinning at me! Why, I believe they look upon me as a newly caught foreign devil, and they're following to see me executed, or——Oh, surely they won't do that!'

A sudden thought had flashed across his brain—an echo or reflection of something he had read or seen in connection with some poor wretch being kept as a captive by the Chinese and exhibited in a great bamboo cage.

The first effect of the thought was to send a shiver through him, chilling him to the bone; the following

minute a sensation of heat made him flush to the temples, and he ground his teeth.

'Yes,' he said to himself, 'they'd better! No, they daren't. They're pig-headed enough, but they must know that I'm an Englishman—well, an English boy, then,' he added correctively. 'Oh, they daren't! I'm only my father's son—plain Stanley Lynn—but as soon as they knew at headquarters they'd send a gunboat to demand me; and—of course—yes, it's a fine thing to be a British subject, for even if I am only a boy, our English Minister wouldn't have a hair of my head injured—if he could help it.'

Stan thought this addition to his musings in a very different spirit to that which had preceded it. One minute he was proud and elated at the idea that he was an Englishman, with a general touch-me-if-you-dare sort of sensation making his eyes flash and sparkle and his cheeks glow; the next he was fully awake to the fact that he was a tightly bound prisoner, having a most abominable ride to some cage, alone and helpless among an inimical race of ignorant people who were delighted to see the predicament he was in—so much alone that, failing Wing, not one would raise a hand in his behalf. He was quite right about Consul and Minister and the stupendous machinery that would be set in motion to rescue his insignificant self, but there was the setting it in motion. All depended upon Wing.

'But where is Wing?' he said half-aloud, and he wrenched his head round to look back along the procession, half-expecting to see the poor fellow aloft in another chair, a prisoner, bound as well.

There was a savage growl at his movement, which

made the chair sway, and *bang!* one of the soldiers brought the spear he shouldered heavily against the cane frame, making Stan start and then dart an angry glance at the man.

Bang! came the shaft again, and Stan winced once more, but bit his lips with annoyance, for his captors yelled with laughter, and others struck at the chair.

They struck in vain now.

'It's to make me squirm—to make the foreign devil squirm,' muttered Stan; 'but I'm not going to now. I'd die first.'

Whether Stan would have gone as far as he mentally asserted is open to question, but he was able to maintain sufficient control over himself to sit fast; not even flinching when, after several heavy blows had been given, without result, to the chair, one of the most facetious of the guards—a big, broad-faced, smooth-headed fellow—lowered his spear and gave the young prisoner a prog with it in the back.

It hurt, for Stan's white flannels were thin; but the poke was not given with sufficient force to go through the material, and further manifestations of the kind were put a stop to by a fierce shout from the captain, though the men all joined in a hearty laugh.

'Brutes!' muttered Stan; and he sat forward, sweeping the country before him, as he devoted himself to wondering what had become of Wing.

It was evident that he had not been made a prisoner, for he was nowhere to be seen; and now, as the chair went on, jig, jog—jig, jog, Stan's brain was agitated by the terrible thought that his poor

attendant might have been struck down badly wounded, if not killed, in the sharp struggle, for he had no reason to hope that he had escaped.

'If I could only ask!' thought Stan. But he could not. He had picked up a few words and sentences since he had been in the country, but felt very doubtful about making himself understood; while, when he did at last make up his mind for the effort, and leant forward to venture a question to one of his bearers, all he elicited was a derisive burst of laughter, interspersed with mocking imitations of his attempts at the Chinese tongue.

'Brutes!' he muttered again; and he rode on in silence for some time, till his anxiety to know more of Wing's fate proved too much for him, and this time he appealed to the soldier who had used his spear.

But the only reply was a menacing gesture, accompanied by a scowl, for the man had not forgiven him for being the cause of a sharp reproof from the captain, though it is doubtful whether Stan could have made himself understood.

Fortunately for the prisoner, the pain he suffered from his blows and bonds grew more bearable as the procession jogged slowly on; for the sun was hot, pauses had to be made from time to time to exchange bearers, and nobody seemed to be in the slightest hurry. The result was that after a couple of hours' tramp the great gate-tower seemed to be nearly as far off as ever, and Stan had sunk into a gloomy state of thinking, in which he divided his time between determining to make the best of things and forcing himself to take as much notice as he could

of the devious track they followed through the rice-fields, whose beautiful, tender green seemed to refresh the poor fellow's weary eyes.

'Yes,' he said to himself, 'I may be able to escape, and I might do worse than make straight for the farmhouse. The people there are friendly, and I could reckon upon their helping me to the river and some boat. Once in a boat with some provisions, I could float down to the *hong* easily enough, even if it took days or a week or two because of my being forced to hide in the reeds by day and only go on by night. But why go to the farm first when, if I could get to the river from the town, I could start on at once? I shall see,' he muttered; 'and there can be no harm in noticing the country along here. It might be useful to know. But I wonder what has become of poor old Wing.'

He sat on all through the heat of the day, drooping as well as wondering, but growing more low-spirited as he swayed forward, jog, jog, jog, jog, in wearisome fashion, and having hard work at times to sit erect. And but for a couple of halts that were made for the men to rest and smoke as they lay about in the thick grass at the edge of some paddy-field, he would have sunk forward as far as his bonds allowed and fallen into the stupor of exhaustion.

After the last halt, which was greatly prolonged, the way led along a much more beaten road; and now the great gate seemed to have loomed up with wonderful suddenness through the hot haze of the Asiatic afternoon. The sight of the huge building and the walls seemed to give the prisoner more energy, making him gaze excitedly at what he could

see of the dwarf buildings beyond the encompassing walls, and wonder where the prison would be situated that was to be his halting-place.

He now recalled, too, the tramp through the darkness of the early morning with Wing, the way up to the sleeping guards from inside, and the narrow escape from being taken when the great gate was approached.

It now seemed certain to the lad that they must, after all, have been seen by some one of the guards, and quietly pursued and trapped at the farm; and after settling this in his own mind, he turned once more as he swayed along on his bearers' shoulders to wonder where he would be imprisoned, questioning himself as to what sort of a place it would be—whether very strong, high up in a tower, or low down in a dungeon. Where?

'If poor old Wing were only here!' he groaned to himself as they approached and passed under the gate. 'We could perhaps escape together. But he must have been killed.—Oh, if I only knew where they are going to put me!'

His head was feverish from his hot and weary ride, which was fast bringing on a strange delirium which made him feel as if it were only a dream after all.

Then it was no dream. Everything was wakeful and a fact, for he knew where he was to be imprisoned, the bearers halting and setting down his chair at the beetle-browed entrance of what proved to be the great guard-room of the gateway tower.

CHAPTER XI.

'TCHACK! TCHACK!'

'THEY 'LL give me some tea,' thought Stan as, with head throbbing so that he could not hold it up, he sank down in the place to which he had been led, too much exhausted by all he had gone through to do more than glance round and see that it was literally a cage, whose floor and bars were of thick bamboos, opening upon a kind of yard from which came a sickening odour.

That was all he could note in the gloom, feeling only too glad to sink down against one side, which also seemed to be formed of bars. Then his eyes closed and he fell into a kind of stupor, in which the whole of the day's adventures passed before him, from the earliest start till he staggered into his prison and heard the door banged to and fastened behind him. There it all was again, seeming to be beaten into his head with some great mallet with sickening reiteration, till sleep came after burning hours of misery, and the beating upon his brain ceased in oblivion.

Mingled with the thump, thump, thump, thump, as of his troubles being driven into his head so that he should never forget them, he had some conscious-

ness of a door opening and a great red paper lantern appearing through the wall, shining like the moon seen through a thick fog.

Then there was a bang as of some heavy pot being placed on the floor, followed by another which splashed over his hand. Some one seemed to be speaking to him in a hoarse, deep, guttural voice, followed by a surly grunt; but he could not rouse himself sufficiently to answer what seemed in his dream-like state to be questions in the Chinese tongue; while directly after there was a tremendously loud rattling, such as might have been produced by a great staff being drawn over bars. Then further rattling, with shouts as if some one yelled the syllables 'Ho, yo fi yup, yup, yup!' close by his head, with the effect of producing other sounds full of rage, snarling, squeaking, and squealing, while *bang! bang! bang!*—it was as if some great cat, a tiger or leopard, were bounding heavily about its cage.

Then came the rattling as of the great staff being drawn across the bars again, a grunt or two, the banging of the heavy door, and silence.

It was to Stan as if he had been roused out of his trance-like sleep to hear all this, as the great, ruddy, moon-like lantern burned more hotly into his eyes; and then all was closed in darkness, silence, and oblivion once more.

Cock-a-doodle-doo—oo—oo!

A long-drawn crow, hoarse and croaky as ever cochin-china fowl uttered after heavily flapping its wings, and Stan was back in Old England, dull, aching, stupidly drowsy, and in a confused way feeling that he was by a farmyard with the window open.

But his eyelids did not part, and those of his brain seemed to be quite dark still, for he had not the most remote conception of anything more.

And so he lay in a hutched-up, awkward position, with the back of his head against some upright bamboos, without stirring. It was almost dark, but the cool gray of the coming morning was filtering down into a vile, close yard, and spreading slowly in through the bars of a great cage, divided in two by the uprights against which the lad had sunk; and as slowly as the light stole into the great cage, so stole in the prisoner's power to think.

At last it began to seem—it can be called nothing else—that something was fidgeting his hair about. At first there was a gentle touch or two as if it were parted, and then something tickled close up to the crown, and Stan gave his head a twitch, but he did not open his eyes.

The tickling sensation ceased, however, and he was slowly sinking back into oblivion, when the fidgeting and tickling began again, making him jerk his head.

Again the fidgeting feeling passed off, and he was nearly unconscious once more, when he was aroused, and this time he opened his eyes wonderingly, to grasp some notion of there being a softly diffused and faint light gradually coming down in a sloping way through thick bars; and then there was the tickling, and the stirring of his hair.

Wakefulness and reason were slowly asserting themselves now, making the lad turn his head slightly on one side and try to look up.

He did so in a dreamy kind of belief that he was

somewhere in a place with a huge spider, one far bigger than he had ever imagined before; that it was hanging from the ceiling; that it kept on lowering its legs till they were near enough to touch his head; and that then it began to softly stir his hair.

So Stan, after screwing his head sideways, raised one eye to the fullest extent and looked wonderingly up for that great spider. But he did not see it, for the simple reason that the spider was not there.

But he saw something else, which brought his full senses back in an instant, making him utter a hoarse cry, and, scrambling up, bound right across to the other side of the great bamboo cage into which he had been thrust.

It was sufficiently startling, and must have had a similar effect upon one older and sturdier than he.

For as he brought his eye to bear, there, just above his scalp, was suspended what at the first glance through the dim light seemed to be the head and neck of a large snake, softly dancing up and down before descending to touch his hair. But that was only his first idea, for the second glance was sufficient to make him grasp the fact that it was no snake, but a long, thin-fingered hand with quivering, pliable fingers, smooth below but hairy at the back, and at the end of a very long, thin, hairy arm which had been thrust between two upright bamboos.

It was only momentary, for as Stan uttered his hoarse cry the hand darted out of sight as rapidly as if it had been made of india-rubber, to be followed by the sound of a bump as if its owner had made a bound across the part of the divided cage in which

Stan now stood with every nerve quivering, and his brain actively at work bringing back the incidents of the previous day.

'Another prisoner,' thought Stan, and he shuddered with horror, for slight as was the glance he had obtained, it was enough to raise up plenty of horrors. The hand and arm were frightfully attenuated, and he felt that if this were a fellow-prisoner, the poor creature must have suffered the most terrible starvation to bring him to such a state. He was a prisoner too, and so horrible were his feelings for the next few moments that the confusion and semi-delirium of the previous night threatened to return.

But after he had rested, his thoughts grew calmer again in the silence and the soft gray light.

He was a prisoner, but an English prisoner, he felt, and the Chinese guard would not dare to injure him.

He gazed rather wildly at the place from which he had leaped, to see upright bamboos very close together, but with space enough between for a very thin hand and arm to be thrust through; and now the disposition to speak to one who must, whoever he was, be a fellow-sufferer came uppermost.

But he did not speak; his thoughts took another direction, and he mastered his position.

He was, in fact, in a great cage—such a one as might have been used by a keeper of wild beasts for the dwelling of some animal.

The floor was, as before stated, composed of bamboo bars similar to those which formed the front; and as the light broadened slightly, Stan could just make out that there was a light wall only a few feet

away, and that the wall was continued upward some ten or a dozen feet.

Turning his eyes to the spot from which he had leaped, Stan swept the open division again, noting the while that all was perfectly still. But he could see nothing, till all at once he fancied that he detected the tip of one of the thin fingers again; but at the slightest movement he made, the finger, if it had been there, was withdrawn.

It was impossible to help a shuddering sensation creeping through him, for there was something strangely uncanny about that hand seen in the dim twilight; and the thought of being so close a fellow-prisoner of so weird a personage grew more and more repellent as the utter silence continued.

But there was one satisfactory thing to make matters more bearable, and that was the fact that the light was steadily increasing; and as, after trying hard to penetrate the mysterious screen, Stan once more looked about his prison, and above all examined the doorway through which he had been thrust, he caught sight of two clumsy-looking pots, which, though the produce of the land which gave us porcelain, were of such rough, coarse earthenware that it would have been considered too rough for flower-pots at home.

But the prisoner's throat felt parched and his lips hot and cracked, while a rapid inspection proved to him that one of the vessels contained water.

It was no time for being nice. Obeying the natural craving, Stan sank upon his knees, raised the pot with both hands, and the next minute he was drinking deeply of the cool, grateful fluid, which trickled

down with a sensation that was delightful, and he had drunk long and deeply before the questioning thought came:

'Is it clean?'

He set the pot down again close to the wall, and shuddered slightly, for the dank, cool morning air was distinctly tainted with a horrible odour which he believed came from the yard.

Putting all suggestive thoughts from him, he turned his attention to the other pot, and saw that a couple of sticks rose above one side; and to test whether his surmise was correct, he took them both in hand, raised them towards the faint light, and found that he had judged rightly, for he brought up a lump of boiled rice adhering to the chopsticks, which he dropped suddenly on hearing a faint noise to his left.

There was no doubt about the cause; for there, looking more weird and strange than at first, was the limb which had first startled him, with the long, thin hand outstretched, and the fingers twitching in a most unmistakable fashion.

A sense of relief came over Stan now, for he saw at once that this was not the half-mummified hand of some starving prisoner, but that of a large ape; and without hesitation the lad stooped down again, seized the chopsticks, and scooping up with them as much of the wet rice as would stay on, he stepped across to the extended hand, which closed round the food on the instant and disappeared between the bars.

Tchack! came in a low, quick utterance, followed by other sounds which plainly indicated what was becoming of the rice.

'I can't eat that stuff,' thought Stan; and visions

of one of his customary breakfasts floated before his eyes, in company with wondering ideas about how long it would be before any one came and he would have an opportunity to appeal or order the man to put him in communication with some one in authority.

'It 's out of ignorance,' he said to himself. 'They dare not keep me here.'

Tchack! came again, this time in quite a cheerful tone, and Stan's thoughts were again diverted. His face crinkled into a smile, for he felt that this was a fellow-prisoner with whom he could make friends at once; and without hesitation he dug out some more rice with the chopsticks, and dabbed the lump into the once more extended hand.

'Is it good, old chap?' he said in a friendly tone; and for response came:

Tchacker!

'Monkey pidgin—eh?' said Stan as the hand disappeared, leaving some wet grains sticking to the bamboo bars, a fact which resulted in another hand appearing on the prisoner's side and the attenuated fingers cleaning off every grain with wonderful celerity before it disappeared.

'Let 's see what you 're like,' said Stan, putting his face to the bars, to find that there was light enough now to show him a similar division to his own, with a dumpy, solidly built monkey squatting down on the far side, nursing the handful of rice against its broad chest, and picking it up rapidly grain by grain.

As Stan looked through, the creature raised its head, which seemed joined without neck to its chest,

and displayed a pair of keen-looking, very human eyes, peering at him from beneath their straight, overhanging brows; and as they twinkled brightly, there was a third flash from a double set of very white teeth, which were displayed in a grin.

Then the eating went on as if there were not a moment to lose, till Stan fell back half-startled, for as the last white grain disappeared behind the thin, tightly drawn lips, the animal rose upon a pair of short, crooked legs, sprang at the bars, to hold on with its feet, and once more a long, thin, spidery arm and hand came through.

'Hungry—eh?' said Stan, half-annoyed with himself for his display of dread.

Tchack! was the reply, and the fingers curved upward in so suggestive a way that Stan raised the pot and poured into the palm as much as it would hold.

In went the hand again, and Stan stood holding the pot against his breast, listening to the sound made by the monkey eating.

The natural result was that the odour given off by the wet rice rose to the prisoner's nostrils; and it was not enticing, for it was not unlike that of wet clay. But the holder knew that it was rice, and that it was eatable, though unappetising, and it awakened in him a feeling of longing consequent upon its being many hours since he had touched food; so, taking up some of the sticky grains on one of the chopsticks, he raised it to his lips, with the result that they curled slightly in disgust.

But nature was hungry, and not to be disappointed from any fastidiousness displayed by a pair of lips,

nor yet by the disgust of a tongue. It was only the first step that cost, and after making an attempt to eat, Stan went on, to find that the mess, though anything but nice, was satisfying; and he was busy at the second suggestion of a mouthful when he had to draw back sharply, for like a flash the weird hand darted out, grabbed the edge of the pot, and tugged it towards the bars.

But Stan's arm was round the vessel, and his withdrawal carried it away out of the animal's reach.

'Manners!' cried Stan; and he was at once attacked by what seemed to be meant for a volley of reproaches, in tones which somehow seemed familiar and connected with the troubles of the past night, especially as they were accompanied by sounds caused by the animal bounding backwards and forwards, hurling itself from the division bars to those which faced the yard, till *bang! bang! bang!* came a tremendous beating against the door, followed by one angry roar of Chinese adjurations.

Wow! came in a piteous tone from beyond the bars, as the noise outside ceased; and directly after the hand was thrust out, palm upwards, and the fingers twitching.

Stan paid no heed for a few moments, but stood waiting for the door to be opened, ready to attack his jailer, whoever he might be, with such Chinese as he knew; but all remained silent, and a feeling of angry indignation swept over the lad, enraged now as the knowledge of his position flashed through him.

'Insolent brutes!' he said half-aloud. 'I'm a foreign devil, am I? And I'm to be shut up in the next cage to a great monkey, am I? What do

you mean? To make a show of me? Oh, it's unbearable!'

Tchack!

'You think so too, do you?' cried Stan aloud.

Tchacker!

'You think it's worse? Well done. You're a wiser monkey than I thought, then. There, old chap—fellow-prisoner—you shan't find me a bad friend. Here, peg away!' And half-laughing the while—a laugh full of mocking indignation—Stan thrust the pot down close to the bars. In an instant one long arm was holding it tight against them like a band of bone and muscle, and the other was working to and from it like an animated spoon.

'Poor brute!' said Stan softly, and he raised one hand with extended index-finger to touch the hook-like arm.

Ur-r-r—r-r! came in a savage, malicious snarl, and the free hand came down spang upon his wrist, seizing it with startling violence, and snatching it towards the bars, against which it struck heavily.

There was a momentary struggle, during which in imagination the lad saw his fingers being crushed between two trap-like jaws, and then he was free.

'Why, you savage beast!' he cried fiercely.

Tchack! said the monkey; and the hand was going and coming calmly enough now, and almost without a sound.

'Humph!' grunted Stan. 'My fault, I suppose. Thought I was going to take away its food;' and he stood rubbing his wrist gently where it had been bruised against the bamboo bar, and watched the monkey's hands till the last grain had been cleared

out of the pot, which was released and allowed to fall over upon its side.

'Finished?' said Stan, good-humouredly now, for the pain had passed away.

Tchack!

The sound—cry, ejaculation, whatever it may be called—was evidently a reply, and as it was uttered the hand came out towards the prisoner once more.

'Why, you hungry brute!' said Stan. 'No more. All gone,' he cried; and he stooped down to take away the pot.

It was incautiously done, and in an instant the animal's fingers had closed round his hand tightly. For the moment Stan was about to obey his natural instinct and tear his hand away, but it struck him that the grasp was not meant inimically, and that even if it were he must be the stronger of the two, and could prevent his strange adversary from dragging his arm sufficiently through the bars to make use of its teeth. So he stood fast, and found that, in place of tearing hard and trying to drag the hand it had secured through the bars, it was contenting itself with pressing the hand firmly and nestling its own fingers within his grasp, as if the sensation were satisfactory and it enjoyed the proximity of a companion.

'Want to be friends?' said the lad quietly.

Snar-r-r-r-r! went the animal savagely, snatching its hand away, and with one bound leaping to the other side of its cage.

The reason was made plain the next moment. Its hearing was the keener, and it first heard approaching footsteps.

The next minute great bars were being rattled

down from the door, which was thrown open, and three rough-looking Chinese soldiers entered; the first going straight to the barred division and drawing the shaft of his spear cleverly along the bamboos before thrusting the butt through and making prods and savage thrusts with it at the wretched monkey, which shrieked and chattered and bounded about, with noise and turmoil which brought back vividly now the strange sounds Stan seemed to have dreamed in the confused and feverish wanderings of the night.

CHAPTER XII.

'I WISH YOU WERE A DOG.'

HILE one of the soldiers teased and brutally ill-used the monkey, which fought savagely with its aggressor, ending by getting hold of the spear-shaft with teeth and all four hands, and displaying an amount of strength that was wonderful in so small a creature, the other two looked on and laughed till their comrade was tired and merely held on to his spear. Then they condescended to turn their attention to their new prisoner, examining and giving him credit for the empty rice-pot; and after a glance at the other pot, which was half-full of water, one of them, watching for an opportunity, threw its contents all over the monkey, with the result that the poor brute uttered a shriek, loosened its hold of the spear-shaft, and contented itself with dodging the thrusts made at it by its aggressor.

He too now turned to Stan, and made a thrust at him with the spear-butt, and then stared with astonishment at the result.

For Stan's temper boiled over at once.

'You insolent hound!' he roared, striking the bamboo aside, as he sprang at the man. 'How dare you!'

Stan's aspect was tragic, for, in spite of the disproportion between him and his enemy, the man started back, and the scene became a farce.

The great cowardly brute fell against one of his comrades, who responded by giving him a heavy thrust which sent him against the third, who raised his knee so suddenly that Stan's assailant cannoned off and fell heavily against the cage-like partition.

'Hergh!' he growled savagely as he began to gather himself up slowly, glowering at Stan the while and muttering threats. But the next minute he uttered a yell and sprang to his feet, but only to fall back, with his head giving a heavy, resounding rap against the bamboo uprights, where Stan saw that it was held tightly, while his big, round face, turned towards the spectators of his trouble, was wrinkled up into distortions caused by fear and pain.

For the moment Stan was puzzled, and the more so at seeing the other two begin roaring with laughter as their companion continued to yell for help, while they stamped about the prison, thumping the butts of their spears upon the open floor.

'Why doesn't he get up?' thought Stan.

A strange, snarling, growling noise gave the explanation. It was just such a sound as would be given out by a hound worrying a fox, and now it was that Stan grasped what had happened. For the enraged monkey had seen its opportunity when its tormentor had fallen and the back of his head struck the partition; it had darted its long, sinewy hand nd arm through, and snatched them back, drawing soldier's pigtail into the den. Then, with a snarl of triumph, a grab was made with the

other hand and feet, the steel-trap-like jaws closed upon the thickest part of the plait, and holding on with bulldog-like tenacity, and more than double that animal's strength, the fierce little creature growled and worried and tore away till Stan's rage evaporated in something very much like enjoyment of the victim's discomfiture.

'Well done, monkey!' he said to himself, and then waited to see the termination of the encounter.

One thing was very evident, and that was the impossibility of the man freeing himself, for at every struggle to draw the tail from the little animal's grasp, and any increase of the distance between the imprisoned head and the bars, there was a fierce, worrying noise, and the monkey made a bound back which drew the head against the bars with a heavy thump, to the increase of the man's agony, as it forced from him fresh yells for help and more laughter from his companions.

This went on and on, the sufferer running up and down a whole gamut of appeals, cries that were doubtless Chinese oaths hurled at his friends, threats of what he would do to the monkey, and orders to Stan—at least they seemed to be, for he stared furiously at the lad as he shouted, and at last so piteously in the midst of a savage worrying, which sounded as if the monkey was beginning to tear at the sufferer's head, that Stan's compassion was moved, and he went forward to try and get the man free.

But the others dashed at him at once, and holding their spears horizontally, thrust him back, growling out what evidently meant 'No, no, no!'

and completely debarring the lad from giving any aid.

At last, not from good fellowship, but from growing tired of the sport, the two soldiers began to lend an ear to their comrade's appeals; and after a little banter from one, and a few shouts from the other to the monkey, which seemed to Stan to be incitements to the animal to go on worrying, a word or two passed between them, resulting in one picking up the water-pot, putting his spear in a corner, and stepping out into what seemed to be a passage.

Seeing this, a wild idea crossed Stan's mind that now would be his time—that is, to seize the spear and make a dash for liberty.

But he made no attempt, for he felt that a better chance must come, and he waited, to see the man step back directly with the heavy pot brim full. This he bore towards the sufferer, who yelled at him savagely, words which Stan felt certain were a bullying, insulting order to make haste, for he saw the Chinese Aquarius exchange a malicious grin with his comrade, who stood leaning on his spear; and then the whole of the contents of the pot were discharged full at the partition, but with so mischievous an aim that the imprisoned head received a larger share than the monkey on the other side.

But the result was freedom.

Once more the monkey uttered a shriek at the unexpected bath, and darted away, while its victim scrambled up, feeling at his tail, which was ragged and torn frightfully about six inches or a foot from his head.

As the gallant warrior felt how terribly the noble

appendage had been damaged, he burst forth into a piteous howl, and then literally blubbered with misery like a great, fat-headed booby of a boy.

'Oh, how-w!' he cried—'oh, how-w!' and once more his comrades stamped about and thumped the floor with their spear-ends in the exuberance of their delight.

'I wish I thoroughly understood Chinese,' said Stan to himself as, quite forgetting his own troubles, he listened to the crying soldier's string of reproach poured out upon his comrades, till, after wiping the water from his head and clothes, and feeling his tail again from end to end, the pause he made over the gnawed and tattered portion was too much for him.

Uttering a howl of rage, he dashed at his spear, seized it from where it leaned, made for the partition, and thrust the sharp point through.

The monkey took this for a challenge, and uttered a chattering yell of defiance, while Stan saw it advance bravely to meet the fresh assault.

This could only have had one result, but the poor beast found an unexpected ally in Stan, who stepped forward just in time.

The spear was half its length through the bars, and on a level with the monkey's broad breast, as the soldier made his thrust, one which must have spitted the little, dwarfish creature through had not Stan made a thrust at the same moment, diverting the man's aim. The result was that the spear met with no opposition, and the fierce energy with which the stroke at the monkey was made carried the soldier crash against the partition and within reach

of the animal's hands, which passed through the bars, caught him by the ears, and held on for a moment or two—not more.

For the man threw himself back with a yell of dismay, escaped, and, now more enraged than ever, turned upon Stan with his spear.

It would have gone hard with the lad, for the soldier was furious, but his comrades interfered with angry word and action, dragged the spear from him, and bundled him out of the place, before refilling the water-pot and half-filling the other vessel with cold boiled rice.

While these proceedings were taking place Stan attacked the two soldiers verbally with the best Chinese he could command, assuring them that they had made a great mistake in arresting him, an Englishman, bidding them find out what had become of Wing, and ordering them to go straight to the merchant's house at the other side of the town to tell him of what had happened, and then inform the mandarin of the city, so that the speaker might be released at once.

All of this the prisoner emphasised with great volubility. The two soldiers smiled and listened and nodded their heads, before going out and fastening the door after them, leaving poor Stan with the determination upon him to wait patiently until the messages were delivered, but all the time with his unexpected sinking and his common-sense telling him that scrambled jailers had not grasped a word he said.

and torn he cried bitterly; 'they didn't understand a his head. h, why didn't the Doctor teach me Chinese

As the gall that Latin and Greek? They would

have understood me then; while now I'm perfectly helpless, the brutes treating me just as if I were some newly discovered wild beast. Whatever shall I do?

'I know,' thought the lad at last: 'wait till it's dark. These bars are only bamboo, and it will be strange if I can't get through as soon as I set to work. And what then? Why, the river! I must be able to find some boat or another. Pooh! I'm not going to despair.

'No,' he added gloomily after a few moments' thought; 'I can't go alone, and leave poor old Wing in the lurch. He wouldn't leave me, I know. I will make for the farm. Perhaps Wing is over there after all, and for aught I know he may be following me up, and is perhaps hunting for me even now. There, I'm not going to be heart-sick and despairing. I shall get away back to the *hong* after all.'

Tchack!

As Stan talked to himself he was gazing at the prison door, but this sound brought him round in the other direction, to see a pair of bright brown eyes watching him, and the fierce Chinese mountain monkey with its long, thin arm stretched through the bars.

'Hullo, savage!' cried Stan aloud. 'I'd forgotten you. Nice game this, making me your companion. What do the contemptible brutes mean? To send us both to their wretched Zoological Gardens in Peking? I should like to catch them at it! Well, you're not handsome, but, my word, you are a plucky little chap! Think of your tackling

that great hulking John Chinaman as you did! I say, though, it was nearly all over with you with that spear.'

Tchack! said the monkey coolly.

'Say Jack, if that's your name,' said Stan, smiling.

Tchack!

'Oh, very well! Tchack! I say, though, who'd ever think that there was so much strength in that skinny arm? What do you want? You can't be hungry. Want to shake hands?'

Tchack! said the monkey quietly, and it strained out its fingers as far as it could, while its fellow-prisoner could see that it was clinging to the upright bar with the hand-like feet.

'Want to shake hands?' said Stan. 'Now, I wonder whether monkeys have sense enough to know the difference between friends and enemies. Dogs do, of course, but you look a risky one. I've no tail for you to grab, but you might get hold of me and give me an uncomfortable grip. You might drag my hand through and bite and tear it horribly. Perhaps, though, I'm as strong as you are, if it came to a tussle. Yet I don't know; you are wonderfully powerful for such a little chap.'

Tchack!

'Does that mean shake hands? Well, I'm just in the humour to risk it. Perhaps you do know I'm friendly, after all, for you don't look so fierce as you did.'

Stan took a step or two nearer, bringing himself so close that he had only to raise his hand to take that of the fierce-looking little animal; while it was

now light enough for him to see every twitch and wrinkling of its restless forehead as its eyes searched his keenly. Then he waited, occupying the time in calculating his chances.

'If I do let him grip my hand,' he said to himself, 'and he tries to drag it between the bars, I have only to plant a foot against the bars and hold back. He can't get at me to bite unless I let him drag my hand right through, and I'm not going to be such a coward as to shrink. I've been kind to the little brute, and fed him. All animals are ready to be friends with those who feed them, so here goes.'

But here did not go, for another thought struck the lad, and he gave utterance to it.

'What nonsense!' he said. 'I'd better think of making my escape instead of trying experiments with monkeys. I might give him a little more to eat, though. Perhaps that's what he wants after all.'

Stan stood blinking his eyes at the monkey, and the monkey blinked its eyes at him.

'Hungry?' he said aloud.

Tchack! was the reply.

'Not much of a conversationalist for a fellow-prisoner,' said Stan, laughing; and stooping quickly, he caught up the two chopsticks, dug a portion of the rice from the pot, and held it out. 'Here you are,' he said.

The twitching of the animal's face was wonderfully quick, and its eyes twinkled as it stared at its new companion, but for a few minutes it made no offer to take the rice.

'Aren't you hungry?' cried Stan.

Tchack! was the reply, as the hand moved deli-

cately, a couple of fingers pinching off a few grains, which were raised to the animal's nostrils, snuffed at, and then crumbled so that they fell to the floor, while the hand remained outstretched.

'Not hungry? What does it mean, then—a trap?'

There was no reply, and after pitching back the chopsticks into the pot, Stan looked the animal full in the eyes, stood well on the alert, quite ready to plant his right foot against one of the bamboo bars, and then very slowly let his hand go down till it lay in the long, narrow, outstretched palm.

It was the crucial moment then, and hard work to keep from snatching it away, for the long, thin fingers closed over it gently but tightly. But that was all. The animal breathed heavily—it sounded like a sigh—but there was no sharp flashing of the keen brown eyes, only a softened look as they blinked gently; and the fierce little beast just held on as if it enjoyed having company and being talked to, for, perhaps oddly enough, the satisfied feeling began to be mutual, and in what followed the English lad seemed as if he were taking his fellow-prisoner into his confidence in an apologetic way.

'Seems stupid to make friends with a savage monkey,' he said slowly; and as he spoke he began to softly manipulate the long, thin fingers. 'I don't see why. A fellow would not be long in taking up with a strange dog if he were locked up alone as I am. He'd be precious glad of the chance, and you seem ever so much more intelligent than a dog. Like that?'

'That' was a gentle pressure of the hand; but there was no reply, so Stan went on talking gently:

'I wish you were a dog, old chap—our dog, so that I could write a note, tie it to your collar, and send you off with it to the *hong*. As a monkey, you must have more gumption than a dog; but if I did tear a leaf out of my pocket-book, write a message on it, and then tie it to your neck, do you know what you'd do?—No, you don't.—Well, I'll tell you. You'd take it and pick it all into little pieces, and perhaps chew them up. That's about what you'd do; but I dare say I could teach you in time.

'Well,' continued Stan after a short pause, 'I don't believe you mean to bite. Let's see if I can't make you feel that you can trust me.'

It was venturesome, and Stan half-expected to see the hand snatched away, for he did see the eyes open more widely and begin to flash; but he went on with what he purposed doing, slowly and quietly raising his left hand, noticing that he was carefully watched, till it was just beneath the one he held. Then he supported it with his left hand, and began to stroke it gently with his right, smoothing the long, hairy fingers; and as this went on there was another soft, long-drawn sigh, and the animal's eyes nearly closed.

'There!' said Stan suddenly; 'that's lesson the first. Now I'm going to see if there is a way out of this horrible dog-hole.'

He released the hand, and walked quickly away along the front bars, peering through into the yard, but seeing nothing but blank wall, and then crossed to the door, to stand listening.

But he had not been there many seconds before the monkey uttered an uneasy whine, bounded up

the bars of the partition, sprang across to those at right angles, bounded back again higher up, and then, with wonderful activity, lowered itself down, clung fast, and thrust a hand through again.

'Oh, but I can't keep on with that game!' said Stan cheerily. 'Here, I'll take hold again for a minute. Then I must sit down and think. No; I'll try if I can eat some of that horrible rice.'

He went boldly up to the partition this time, and without hesitation took hold of the monkey's hand, saw that it was supporting itself by clutching the bars with its feet, and the next moment two hands were thrust through, ready to be patted and held, a long-drawn sigh of satisfaction being uttered; and as Stan gazed in the intelligent brown eyes, he was ready to declare that the animal smiled.

'Well, it hasn't taken long to get to be friends with you, old chap,' he said. 'There! that will do. I'm going to have my breakfast now.'

Dropping the two hands, he stepped back to the two pots; and as soon as his fellow-prisoner was released it began to bound about the great cage with marvellous agility, snuffling, panting, and snorting, and ending by leaping at the partition, clutching the bars, and holding on, while it watched in perfect silence as Stan took a hearty draught of the water and then sat down with the rice-pot between his knees and began to eat the tasteless, unsatisfactory mess.

A few minutes later, when the prisoner looked up, his wild companion in adversity was out of sight—but not out of hearing, for from somewhere, apparently at the top, a peculiar tearing and crackling sound

began. Sometimes it was a mere gnawing such as might have been made by a rat; then there would be a pause, followed by a sharp crack as a piece of cane was being ripped off. But Stan could see nothing, and coming to the conclusion that the monkey was amusing itself by tearing at some piece of board, he went on with his wretched breakfast, paying no heed till a couple of loud cracks came in succession, followed by quick footsteps and the unfastening of the door.

At the first sound of steps the noise ceased; and as the door was flung open and a couple of soldiers stepped hurriedly in, the prisoner looked up from his mess of rice to find that they were looking at him curiously, then round the place, till, apparently satisfied by seeing how peacefully their charge was employed, they drew back and shut the door, when silence once more reigned.

CHAPTER XIII.

'THE UPROAR WAS TREMENDOUS.'

THAT day passed wearily away, but there were a couple more visits from the jailers, who looked at the prisoner curiously before going back.

At the second visit they brought more rice and water—nothing more—and to all Stan's questions about Wing, the mandarin, and the merchant to whom he had sent a message, there was nothing but a dull, stolid, exasperating stare, and then once more he was left.

Twice over there was the cracking and tearing sound as if the monkey was working away at the wood, but with darkness all was silent within the gate-tower. Plenty of sounds arose from outside, but the prison was evidently right at the back, and the trampling and voices heard from time to time seemed far away.

That night sleep was long in coming, for Stan had much thinking to do, and he carefully examined his prison while the monkey clung to the bars asleep. As far as he could make out, there was not much prospect of escape. By working hard Stan felt that he could perhaps have succeeded in getting through into the monkey's partition, but nothing would

apparently be gained by that, and he sank into a moody fit, full of discontent at his ill-fortune, wishing that he had refused to come up the country, and that he had stayed with father and uncle; ending by working himself up into a low, despondent state, from which he was released by sleep.

Three days dragged their slow course along without change. Plenty of soldiers came in with the jailers to stare at him, and from time to time parties of men and women were admitted to the narrow yard, where they divided themselves between staring at him and the monkey, till the lad grew at times half-maddened.

'Oh,' he groaned to himself, 'the miserable, conceited brutes! To be treated like a curiosity! I believe they look upon me as no better than that monkey. Well,' he added mockingly, 'it's only fair. I don't look upon them as being as good. Poor wretch! How every one teases and ill-uses it! I wish he'd do one of the miserable cowardly wretches some harm.'

But as time went on in a horribly monotonous state of imprisonment, Stan noted that, in spite of the way in which the soldiery prodded and struck at the poor beast with their spear-shafts, it seemed less vicious. When he and the monkey were free from interruption, its great delight was to come to the bars of the cage and thrust out its long, thin arm, while if Stan would take its hand it was perfectly still and happy.

What it was doing up by the top of the bamboos Stan could not make out, but from the beautifully white, sharp state of its two great rows of teeth, the lad came to the conclusion that it was following the

example of carnivorous animals and sharpening and cleaning them upon the woodwork; but after that hurried visit from the men when Stan first heard the cracking and splintering noise, they came no more save at regular times, when they made sure that he was safe, and treated all his attempts to make himself understood as if he were some lower-class animal kept for show.

And during the next two days this seemed to be more and more the case, for the soldiers kept on ushering in common-looking country-people, till at one time the yard was nearly full of gaping spectators, for whose delectation the monkey would be sent bounding about its cage, flying up the bars in front to avoid the shaft of some spear thrust in brutally, but, in spite of rapid strokes, rarely striking it. For the active little creature made prodigious leaps, or swung itself from side to side by its long, thin, muscular arms; and as often as not it scrambled up the partition bamboos to take refuge in the corner farthest from the front, to hold on in full view of Stan, keeping itself in position close to the roof by clinging with both arms round a couple of the bamboos, its head being thrust away in the extreme angle.

There it would stick, well out of reach of the soldier who played showman, till the spectators were turned out of the yard, when it would suddenly snatch its head out of its nook, turning it sharply to look down and listen, keeping quite motionless and on the *qui vive* to hide itself ostrich fashion if there was another sound; but if not, it would hold on by the two bamboos with all four hands and shake them savagely, making them rattle again,

snarling and chattering savagely at its fellow-prisoner, and snapping its sharp ivory trap-jaws as if to show how it would bite if it had a chance, before uttering its favourite cry, *tchack!*

'Poor old chap!' Stan always said. 'I should like to see you get loose among them.'

No sooner had he spoken than the quaint-looking little creature loosened its hold slightly and slid down the two bars, to squat at the bottom and thrust one hand into Stan's compartment, reaching in as far as possible for it to be taken, when it held on tightly, drooping its head as if enjoying the sympathy shown for it. But not for long. Suddenly drawing its hand back, it began to trot like a dog about its cage, to keep on picking up, examining, and smelling the scraps of food and fruit that had been thrown in by the people, stopping to eat some tempting piece, before scrambling up the bars again to the corner nearest the front, where the cracking and tearing noise went on again in the part of the cage beyond the reach of Stan's eyes.

There had been more visitors than usual, with a fresh jailer to play the part of showman, and while some of the people stood gaping stupidly at Stan, the monkey was hunted about till those who watched it were tired, when it took refuge out of reach, refusing to come down.

Upon this the party shifted their attention to Stan, joining the rest in their miserably stupid, gaping stare, which exasperated the lad into imitating the monkey's tactics and turning his back in the far corner, but of course on the floor.

Instead of doing good, Stan found it result in

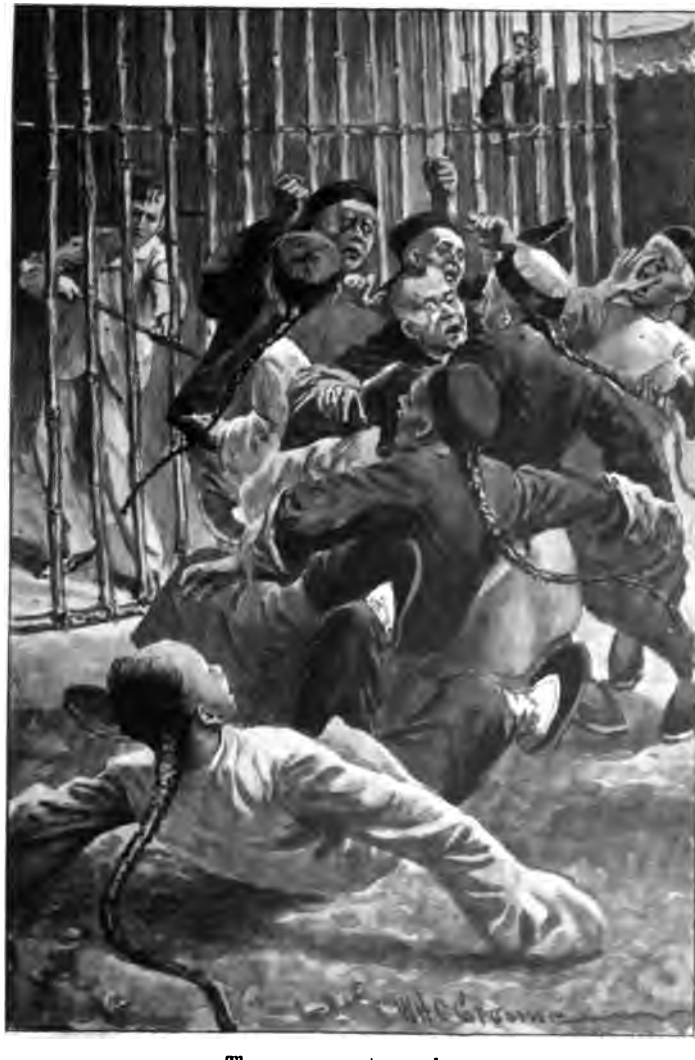
harm, for a most irritating form of annoyance began, the people beginning to take aim and pelt him with oranges, bananas, and pieces of bread-cake; all of which the prisoner, who was simmering with wrath, ignored, declining to make a spectacle of himself, and remaining quite motionless till he felt a heavy dig in his back.

This made him turn sharply, to find that his fresh custodian was reaching in as far as he could, holding his spear by the extreme end of the shaft, and poking at him with his cheek close against the bars and one hand extended to the full extent of his arm.

'Beast!' growled Stan, with a jerk forward, as he flung out his arm; and the next moment, as much to his own surprise as to that of his jailer, he had caught hold of the spear-head and jerked the weapon out of the man's hand.

The little crowd uttered a yell of delight and excitement, while the soldier burst forth into a torrent of bad—Chinese—language, leaping about, shaking his fist at the prisoner, and evidently threatening what he would do if the spear was not handed back on the instant.

But this last affront had made Stan regularly boil over, and a fresh yell came in chorus from the crowd as they saw him swing the spear round to make a thrust at the owner, who shrieked aloud as he darted back, while the swift drawing of the spear-shaft across the bamboos made every one in the yard utter a yell of dismay and begin tumbling one over the other to reach the yard door; an example followed by the gallant warrior, whose speed was hastened, and who began thumping the backs of those who



The uproar was tremendous.

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hindered, when Stan thrust the spear out between the front bars and gave him a few digs in the back.

The uproar was tremendous, and increased by the excitement of the monkey, who, upon seeing his friend armed with the instrument used for torturing him, began to bound about, leaping at and shaking the bars, and chattering savagely, till the last of the occupants of the yard had escaped by the door, which was banged to.

Then, seeing that Stan had drawn in the spear again to stand upon his guard, the monkey stopped short too, watching him, and, like his companion, gazing hard at the inner door, beyond which there was a fierce buzz of voices, the shuffling of feet, and other sounds which announced the coming of more soldiers to disarm the prisoner. But Stan felt in no humour for being disarmed. There was something invigorating in feeling possessed of a weapon, and at the first indications of the prison door being opened he stepped back, drove the head with a thud into the wood, snatched it back, and then, after a step to the rear, he brought the stout elastic shaft across the door with an echoing bang, which had the double effect of silencing and putting to flight the braves in the passage and making the monkey shriek, chatter, and rattle the bars in a way that helped the retreat.

'Hah!' ejaculated Stan as he stood with the spear-head lowered ready to make a thrust at the first man who appeared. 'Let them come. I don't care now.'

This was a fact, for the lad had grown reckless, and determined to attack, extra nerved as he was by the

thought that if he made a bold charge with the spear the Chinese soldiers would turn tail, and if he followed them up he might in the confusion escape.

But he neither charged nor escaped, for the simple reason that the door was not unfastened; and after waiting for some time Stan came to the conclusion that the Chinese braves would not attack, but would probably try to starve him into a state of submission —thoughts which became strengthened later on.

After waiting some time, watching the inner door alternately with that which opened out of the yard, Stan turned to speak to the monkey.

'Hullo, Tchack! Did I frighten you?' he said.

But there was no reply, and no fellow-prisoner in sight, the poor beast being so much alarmed by seeing the torturing spear in the hands of its friend that it had climbed up the bars into its favourite place out of sight, and declined to be coaxed down.

The time went on, and no one returned to the yard, or even ventured, as far as Stan could make out, into the passage; so that the afternoon and evening were passed with the prisoner in the novel position of guard, playing sentry, and waiting for the next jailer to attack.

CHAPTER XIV.

'IT'S ALL OVER!'

IGHT had long taken the place of day, and sound after sound in the great gate-house had put Stan on the alert; but no one had come to the door, and as he rested upon the spear-handle the prisoner underwent pains which endorsed his ideas that he was to be starved into submission. In fact, he grew so hungry that all his pride died out, and in the darkness he humbled himself so that he was glad enough to allay his starving pains by seeking for and picking up some of the fruit and scraps of cake that had been thrown to the strange foreign devil, or wild beast, that the guard of the gate had on view.

'Oh, it's horrible to come down to this!' muttered Stan as, tired out with standing in spite of the support from the spear-shaft, he sat down and ate sparingly just enough, as he put it, to keep himself from feeling faint. But he was terribly hungry, and cake, bread, bananas, and an orange proved, in spite of being gleaned from the cage floor, not bad; so that he did not content himself with enough to keep him from feeling faint, but unconsciously ate heartily, and felt much better. His spirits began to rise, and after

a good, hearty draught from the water-pot, which, fortunately, he had not exhausted, he was so far from being starved into submission that he cut something very much like a caper as he threw himself into an attitude with the spear, looked in the direction of the doorway, and crying, 'Come on!' muttered afterwards, as he made a thrust at an imaginary enemy, 'Oh, how I should like to serve some of you out for this!'

He listened, but there was not a sound to be heard. Then he seated himself with his back to the side-wall, so that he commanded the open partition facing him, the door being to his right, and the front of the cage to his left, while he held the spear ready for action across his knees.

'They'll wait till they think I'm asleep,' he muttered, 'and then pounce on me. But I'm not going to sleep, and if any one does come sneaking in he'll have a prick from this spear that will send him out quicker than he came in. Wonder what father would think if he could see me now! And Uncle Jeff. I wish he were here. No, I don't. I shouldn't like any one I know to be in such a predicament. I say, I don't feel frightened, for they are cowards, and no mistake. Fancy their being ready to run from a boy like me! They won't dare to hurt me, because I'm English. I'd give something, though, to have poor old Wing here. I do hope he has escaped—'scaped—I'd——'scape——hah-h-h-h!'

This last very softly, and then Stan heard no more, for weariness and his large meal had proved too much for him. He was fast asleep.

He was not wide awake when he sprang to his

feet with spear levelled, ready to drive it at the first Chinese soldier who made a rush at him from the door he believed to have been burst open with a sharp, crackling sound.

The thrust was not delivered, because no one made a rush; in fact, all was perfectly still. And when, after a long pause, during which his imagination had been very busy peopling the dark cage with crouching enemies in various corners waiting for their opportunity to spring at him, he began cautiously to make little pushes with the steel point here and there, without result, and ended by advancing softly towards the open door, to be checked by the spear bringing him up short with the point in the wood, it began to dawn upon him not only that the door was shut, but that he must have been asleep.

'How queer!' he muttered. 'I was perfectly certain that the door was burst open, and I'm sure I heard a crackling sound.'

Thoroughly satisfied, after a little feeling, that the door was close shut, he turned round to face the bars, finding that while all elsewhere was pitch-dark, there was a faint suggestion of light there; inasmuch as he could just make out the black bamboo bars with the darkest of gray streaks between them, clearly enough cut save in one place, where, high up, there was a big blur.

He stood with his heart still beating heavily, consequent upon the startling manner in which he had been awakened.

And as he stood gazing with eyes whose pupils were dilated in the darkness, that blur, high up towards the top of the bars, seemed to wear a familiar

shape, which idea grew and grew upon him to such an extent that he tried to give it a name, and said softly:

'Tchack!'

He was right, for in an instant it began to glide down the bars like a couple of the beads on a scholastic numeration frame, reaching the bottom lightly, to utter the same word.

'Why, however did you get out there?' said Stan excitedly. 'What nonsense! I'm looking at the side instead of the front.'

He turned sharply, extended his hand, and the next moment touched the partition bars, and grew more confused.

'It isn't the side,' he muttered; 'this is the side; and that is the front, by the light coming there. Have you got out, Tchack?'

Stan's heart beat fast at the idea, for it was full of suggestions of escape.

But a soft, peculiar sound changed the current of his thoughts, and looking to his left, he was conscious of the dark blur passing quickly up to the top of the bamboo bars, and passing horizontally along; then, as the blur died out in the darkness, he heard the monkey come closer, working itself high up from bar to bar of the partition against which he stood, and glide swiftly down, brushing his breast with one hand as it dropped to his feet.

Tchack! it said softly, and the next moment the thin, sinewy hand was foraging about him to get at his, into which it nestled, and the poor animal uttered a low, heavy sigh of content.

For some minutes Stan could only think in a

puzzled, confused way, feeling that he must be dreaming; but at length things settled themselves in an orderly way in his brain, till it became perfectly clear to him that the monkey must have some way out of the top of its cage which enabled it to pass along to his place.

If so, he reasoned, the yard must be open to it; and if it could get into the yard, it was quite possible that it could get through the doorway or over the wall; and if so, it was probable that it could get into some court or lane by the gate-house.

If the monkey could do this, he argued directly after, why could not he?

And now he could think clearly, his reason suggested that the crackling and splintering noise he had so frequently heard must have been caused by the animal trying to gnaw its way out, the noise which woke him having been made during the final efforts.

Stan's heart began to beat faster and his ideas to flow more freely. He wondered now why it had not all seemed clear to him at once, for it was evident that if he could get through the partition and into the monkey's cage, there was the way open for him also to escape. He had never troubled himself about the bars between him and his fellow-prisoner. Why should he have done so? He did not want to escape from one cage to the next. But now he recalled that the bamboos were smaller than those in front; a few touches of his hand confirmed this, and withdrawing the other from the monkey's grasp, he seized two of the bars, and the animal sprang up them at once.

'Oh, if I could only climb like you!' said Stan to

himself as he went from bar to bar, trying them and giving them a shake, when, after a few trials, to his surprise he heard one of those he held creak in a peculiar way; and upon seizing it with both hands, to his astonishment and delight he found it give way with a sharp crack, the middle having been gnawed through, while, climbing up a little, he was able to use it lever fashion and wrench it so much on one side that in another minute he managed to force himself through and stand in the place from which the monkey had escaped.

It is only the first step that costs, the French say in their proverb, and Stan found it so here. After a time he was able to make out what the monkey did to escape, for, close up in the left corner, he made out that instead of the bars looking regular black streaks against the gray light, there was one large, ragged patch of gray; and upon climbing up, by clinging leg helped, to a couple of the bars, he soon reached the top, where one had been gnawed right through and was now a splintery, sharp mass of fibres. Here, after some difficulty and a good deal of tearing, Stan managed to get through and slide down outside the bamboos, to drop the next minute into the yard.

It seemed too good to be true, and he paused in doubt to look round for and speak to the monkey; but he could not make out where it was, and he had no time to spare.

There was no sound of sentry near, no sign of danger; so, making for the gateway, he found it possible to climb, and soon reached the top of the wall in which it was placed.

Still no sound—nothing but darkness around; and thoroughly strung up now, the lad lay flat on the wall for a few moments, before lowering his legs, hanging at full length, and then dropping, to come down heavily upon rough paving-stones, but with the delight thrilling through him contained in the thought that to some extent he was now free.

He hesitated for a few moments, listening and looking to right and left, thinking of the dark and devious lane along which he had passed with Wing upon that unlucky morning, and wondering whether he could retrace his steps. But he felt that it would be madness to attempt it; and besides, his one great idea was to reach the river, feeling sure that sooner or later he would find an empty boat moored somewhere, and once on board that, he felt that he would be safe.

He had determined to start off and follow the first turning he came to, in the hope of reaching the riverside before daylight, when something seemed to induce him to look up.

His blood began to turn cold, for there on the wall above, dimly seen in the darkness, he could make out the head of some one intently watching his every movement.

It was for life and liberty that, giving a violent start, he dashed off; breathing freely the next minute, for he realised the fact that he had been watched by his dumb fellow-prisoner, the monkey starting as violently as he did at the first movement, and disappearing instantly into the precincts of the prison.

For the moment Stan felt as if, owing so much as he did to the quaint-looking animal, he would

have liked to coax it to follow him; but common-sense told him that he would be wasting valuable time, and perhaps sacrificing the liberty he was on the point of securing, so he kept right on, feeling damped by the fresh thought that perhaps he was on the wrong side of the great city-wall.

'Can't help it,' he said; 'there is no choice. This one may turn out the best.'

In the spirit of this thought he hurried along the narrow lane, which was so dark that he could hardly pick his way, and seeing nothing but that it was shadowed by low-roofed, overhanging houses, whose occupants were so far silently asleep; but from the way in which house and *hong* followed one another, he felt what he had noted when with Wing, that the city must be densely populated, and that he must find some hiding-place before daybreak.

He tramped on for quite a couple of hours through what seemed to be a deserted city, doubling here and there, but without a sign of the main artery he sought, till, just as he was in despair and ready to sink with weariness and the thought that all his toil had been in vain—for the tops of the houses were beginning to show clearly against the gray sky—he came upon a wider turning. Glancing hesitatingly down it to see if it offered anything like a hiding-place, he rushed forward at once; for there, stretching to right and left, was the black, flowing river, with big junks moored close together, and beyond them and the smaller boats crowding the stream were the house-boats and dwellings by the farther shore.

A couple of minutes later Stan was on the hither bank, hurrying by boat after boat, but all too big

to be manageable; and he kept on and on, feeling that he had not a minute to spare, for at any moment early risers might be on the move, and the sight of a fugitive English lad would be sufficient to raise a shout—and a hue and cry to hunt him down.

'It's all over!' he groaned to himself suddenly; and he made a dart forward to get in the shelter of a great junk aground right up to the bank, for all at once he heard the splash of an oar, and a boat was being pushed off from the far side, looking wonderfully plain now in the fast-broadening dawn.

It was for liberty, so there was no time to put in practice the familiar old proverb of 'Look before you leap.' Stan was running as he placed the stranded junk between him and the rowers, so he made a bound as he reached the lowest part midway between the high bows and the towering stern, springing from a rough kind of wharf on to the junk's deck, which seemed to be about a couple of feet lower than the wharf.

The leap was nerved by despair; he had a good take-off, and for a brief moment or two he saw flowing water below him; then he came down on the rough bamboo deck. There was a soft, crushing sound, and he went through some of the rotten wood down into darkness, to fall upon his side and lie motionless, looking up at the gray, ragged patch he had made, and holding his breath as he listened for the coming of the boatmen, who must have heard the noise.

CHAPTER XV.

'CHINESE MEN-OF-WAR.'

TAN LYNN lay holding his breath and straining his ears, till he uttered a hoarse gasp, and all the while the murmur of voices and the plashing of an oar came nearer and nearer. Then the sounds were so close that he raised himself a little to look round for some hiding-place in the depths of the vessel, and then dared not stir. But all at once, just as he felt that the boat must be alongside, relief came in a hearty laugh uttered by one of the boatmen, the plash, plash, plash of the oar grew more distant, and he let nerve and muscle relax till he felt limp and helpless, ready to do nothing but lie panting amongst the rotten wood, resting and trying to recover his failing powers.

The light overhead increased, and as his eyes wandered here and there he could see bright cracks and rifts in the deck and high up in the sides, all evidences that he had found a sanctuary in some dilapidated, half-rotten junk which had been drawn close inshore ready for breaking up, its services being evidently at an end.

The morning grew brighter, and fresh sounds of plashing came near, tempting him to creep through

the half-darkness to where the first gleams of the morning sun streamed through a rift in the side. Upon reaching it and applying his eyes, he found that he could command a good view of the river to right, left, and across, with the water becoming animated, boats large and small passing and re-passing, the opposite shore waking up, and smoke beginning to rise from the house-boats moored close to the bank, and all the morning business of a great city appearing around.

If only the old junk were left alone, Stan felt that he might lie in hiding till night. There might be a possibility of his marking down some boat, and as soon as it was dark wading or swimming to it, when, if he could loosen it from its moorings and secure the mast, sails, or oars, escape would be simplicity itself. But, as the lad argued, there were so many *ifs*.

'But I oughtn't to grumble,' he muttered. 'I have got out of the prison, and I am here in a capital hiding-place where nobody is likely to come.'

Just about the time when he had come to this conclusion a waft of some peculiar odour from food being cooked seemed to float down the river and reach his nostrils, producing a sensation that was repeated again and again with increasing violence, till the poor fellow uttered a low moan of misery.

'If this goes on I shan't be able to bear it,' he muttered; and then, setting his teeth hard, he groaned out through them, 'I must—I must. Oh, what a coward I am! I've only got to wait till it's dark, and then surely I can land and find something somewhere.'

But even as he tried to console himself with these words, he felt more and more hopeless, not seeing for a moment where he was to search, and all the time suffering more and more keenly.

For in all directions smoke was rising from the hundreds upon hundreds of house-boats that lined the shores, as well as from the many one-storied houses clustering together, and a strange mingling of the most maddening scents came floating around—literally maddening to one whose sole sustenance for many hours had been a couple of bananas and a piece of cake.

It was all so horribly civilised, too. The fugitive was in far-away Asia, but his nostrils were assailed with the steam of fragrant tea, freshly roasted coffee, newly baked bread, frying fish, and appetising bacon.

No wonder the starving lad called it maddening as he crouched down in the darkness and tried to think of other things.

Before long, however, he had something else to take his attention, for a procession of nearly a dozen huge junks came slowly down the stream, each with its leering, painted eyes and gay dragon-like gilded ornamentations.

They were full of men armed with spear, fork, and trident, besides in parts bristling with matchlock barrels, while fore and aft the watcher could see that they carried big service-guns.

'Chinese men-of-war, full of soldiers!' Stan mentally exclaimed; but only to alter his opinion directly, for he had some little experience of the Government troops, and knew that the men all wore a grotesque kind of uniform.

They were not merchant-vessels, he thought, for though many of the trading-junks carried armed men, those before his eyes were out of all proportion.

'Could they be pirates?' he asked himself; but the sight of the leading junk casting anchor in mid-stream—an example followed by the rest—put an end to his surmises, for they were evidently at peace with the people in the vessels about them and on shore, many landing and mingling with the men who came to the sides and crowded in boats about the anchored vessels to supply them with food.

So much was going on all about him in this latter way that every now and then Stan felt that, come what might, he must land and seek for something, even if it was only a loaf of bread, to appease his hunger; but he knew it meant surrendering his liberty, for there would be a crowd round him at once; while doubtless by this time it was known that the foreign devil had escaped.

Stan watched till the morning was well advanced, longing for the night to come even though the sun was not yet at its height, while now a fresh agony assailed him; the rugged deck overhead began to get hotter and hotter, and the air about him suffocating, till at last he felt that at all hazards he must crawl up and trust to his not being seen while he crept to some spot where the remains of the lofty stern would act the double part of shading him from the sun and the curious eyes of those who passed.

There are limits to human endurance. Stan had not slept for above an hour during the previous night, and the bodily and mental toil he had gone through were tremendous. Hence it was that when his

sufferings were at the worst, the faintness produced by his hunger and the heat more than he could bear, a half-delirious kind of insensibility stole over him—half-stupor, half-sleep—which tided him over the hottest part of the day, rendering him oblivious to all that was going on, till he awoke suddenly, to find, to his amazement, that it was twilight in his hiding-place, and on looking out through a rift he could see the river glowing like blood from the reflection of the sunset clouds.

In his excitement at the beauty of the scene which met his eyes lower down the river, he clapped his hands together, and had hard work to refrain from shouting aloud, merely standing gazing out through the open rift in the planking, and feeling giddy now in his joy.

Hunger and heat were forgotten, and he gazed out till his eyes grew dim and he had to make an effort to avoid yielding to the giddiness and swimming which attacked his head.

Strange that one in such a terrible position should feel such ecstasy upon seeing a glorious vision in the sunset beauties of that far-eastern river? Not at all. Stan Lynn was in no sentimental mood to be moved to such excitement by a few orange-and-gold clouds reflected in the water, or the gay aspect of the thronging people haunting the great warlike junks still moored higher up. Stan's beautiful vision was something far more simple. It was that of a lad of about his own age seated in a *sampan* which he had moored about a hundred yards lower down the stream. There he was, sitting alone, unnoticing and unnoticed save by the watcher in the crumbling junk's

hull, who saw him pull up a silvery fish, and then, after putting it into a basket between his feet, proceed to rebait his hook and cast it in again.

Was it hunger, then, which produced a longing for a few raw fish? Again nothing of the kind. As Stan's eyes lighted upon that small boat, which seemed to have a little mast and matting sail laid with the oars and pole projecting over the stern, the idea had struck him that this was exactly the kind of boat for which he longed. Could he but gain possession thereof and get rid of the boy who was fishing, while retaining his lines and bait, the *hong*, no matter how many days' journey distant, was within easy reach; and hence when Stan clapped his hands it was after coming to the determination that he would have that boat at all costs.

But how?

CHAPTER XVI.

'OH!—HAH!'

'WHERE there 's a will there 's a way,' says the old proverb.

It is not quite true, but there 's a great deal of truth in it; and Stan had made up his mind how to gain possession of the boat almost before the boy had caught another fish.

The first idea was to wait till it was quite dark, so that his proceedings might not be seen by people in the many boats or from either shore; but he dared not wait, for at any moment the boy might be satisfied with the fish he had caught—scores, for aught Stan could tell—pull up his anchor, and row ashore, and the chance of getting the means of reaching the *hong* would be gone. What he did must be done at once, Stan concluded, and he prepared to act.

Fortune was favouring him, for the boat swung by a rope from the bows, and the boy was at the other end, facing the stern, over which he hung his line; and consequently he was sitting with his back to him who was planning the onslaught upon his peace.

Stan's thoughts ran fast as he watched through the gap in the side of the junk and completed his plans,

getting them so compact and clear that at last, as the boy fished on, it seemed as if he had nothing to do but make a start and succeed; but when at last he was quite strung up to the sticking-point, obstacle after obstacle began to appear and suggest impossibilities.

He was safely hid in the hold of the junk, but the moment he appeared on deck in his white flannels he would be a mark for every eye, from the crews on the high poops and sterns of the great junks to the people on the house-boats and shore, as well as the busy folk paddling here and there in the little *sampans* which were constantly on the move up, down, and across the river.

He seemed to hear the shout raised, 'Foreign devil!' and to see the fishing boy, warned thereby, jumping up in his boat, pulling up the little wooden anchor, and rowing out of his reach, while scores of eager people joined in to hunt him down.

Stan's venture seemed to become more and more mad, and he breathed hard, feeling that he must give it up. But there was the river before him, one wide-open way, flowing down and ready to bear him onward night and day toward his friends.

But he wanted the boat, and the only way was to seize it—steal it, he told himself, though he comforted himself with the thought that he was a prisoner trying to escape from his enemies, and that such a reprisal would be just.

'I must—I will do it,' he panted. 'Oh, I wish I wasn't such a coward to hesitate like this!—And there's another fish. He must have caught enough to leave me a good meal, and I am so, so hungry!

Now then! Once to be ready!' he muttered, with his old school-games rising before him.

'Twice to be steady!'

He paused here long enough to see the boy hook and draw in another fish, then bait again, and——

Stan was in agony, for the boy hesitated, paused to pick up a basket and examine its contents, and then he seemed as if he were satisfied and about to haul up his anchor and make for the shore.

'Too late!' groaned Stan. 'I ought to have tried before. It's all over. I must look out for another boat.'

He was casting his eyes in other directions, when, with a feeling of relief that is impossible to describe, he saw the boy drop down again and continue fishing.

Stan's nerves and muscles were now like steel, and he began to crawl for the broken portion of the deck, got well hold of a cross-piece of bamboo with both hands, and commenced swinging himself to and fro from his hands till he could get one foot up, then the other, level with his face; and by a clever effort he raised himself so that he could, thanks to old gymnastic games at school, fling himself on to the unbroken part, where, after a few moments' pause, he began to crawl to the edge of the deck where the bulwarks had broken and rotted away. Then, feeling that he must dare everything now, he lowered himself down, his feet sinking, and the water rising about him as he stretched his arms out till it was up to his hips.

And there he hung, a white figure in the evening glow, right in view for a few moments, as he hesitated before making the final effort.

'Suppose he shows fight,' he thought to himself.

'Well, I must show fight too. I've licked English chaps as big as myself, and it will go hard if I can't lick a Chinese.'

At this point he straightened his fingers, which were crooked over a ragged piece of bamboo, and *plosh!* he went down feet first with a heavy, sucking noise; the water closed over his head with a deep, thundering roar, and keeping himself quite rigid and his eyes wide open, he waited till, after what seemed an immensely long time in darkness, his head rose above the ruddy surface of the water, and he found that he had turned as the current carried him along, so that he was looking at the rotten old vessel he had left.

Stan was skilful swimmer enough to reverse his position, and found it none too soon, for there was the boat he sought to reach some forty yards away, and so much out of the course he was taking that he had to begin swimming till he was well in a line with his goal, but so much nearer that as he ceased striking out he was close upon the anchor-line.

The next minute he had touched it gently, and at the happiest moment for his success, the boy having hooked a fish—a large one—which took up his attention so much that Stan softly seized the bow with both hands, let his legs float on the swift current, and then by a quick effort drew himself well up and rolled over into the bottom of the boat, where he lay quite still beside the folded-up little matting sail.

The boat rocked so that the owner looked sharply over his left shoulder, but not far enough to see the invader of his boat; and probably attributing the movement to his own exertions, he went on playing

his big fish; while, reaching up his hands, Stan got hold of the painter and began to haul, till, to his great delight, he weighed the little anchor, and saw that the stream was carrying them down.

Still the boy did not turn, but hauled away at his line and gave it out again, as if afraid that if he were too hard upon his prize it would break away.

This went on for a good five minutes, till, apparently satisfied, the boy sank upon his knees and reached over the stern, hanging down so as to get a shorter hold, and ended by bringing the fish's head well within reach, and while holding on with his left hand, he crooked his right finger ready, so as to turn it into a gaff-hook.

Stan saw a part of what was going on, and suspected the rest, as he seized his opportunity to get hold of the anchor-stock.

The next moment the fisher had raised himself up and swung a fish of some five pounds weight flop into the boat; while, as if acting by a concerted motion, Stan reached over and swung in the little grapnel—the actions of the lads bringing them round, from being back to back, now face to face.

Flop! flap! flap! went the fish.

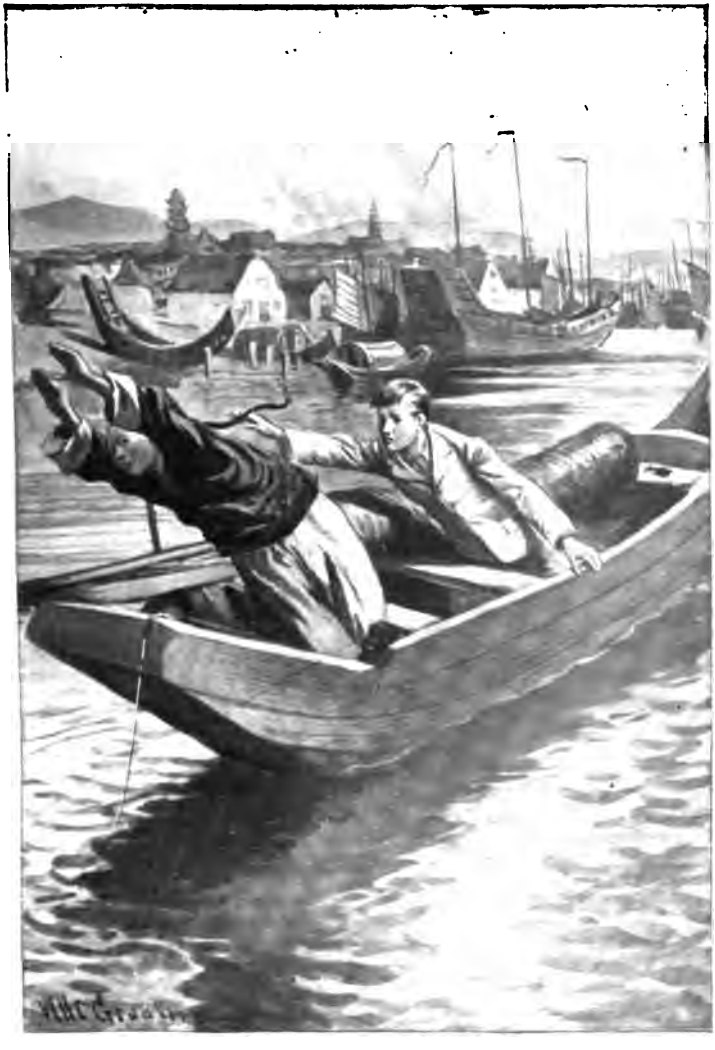
Bang! bang! went the anchor.

'Oh!' ejaculated the Chinese lad, opening his mouth wide.

'Hah!' ejaculated Stan, springing up to seize his adversary.

But the latter did not wait to be seized.

Grasping the fact that the boat was gliding downstream, and that he was face to face with a foreign devil, he raised his hands together well above his



'Hah!' ejaculated Stan, springing up to seize his adversary.

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head and dived over the side in the easiest, most effortless way, gliding over like a blue seal blessed with a bald head and a big tail; when, as Stan dropped down in the boat, keeping only his head over the side, he saw him rise again far enough behind, and begin swimming with all his might for the shore.

Stan had something else to do besides watch the boy. He had some knowledge of boat management, and felt that he must risk everything now in the way of being seen; so, seizing the little mast, he stepped it, hauled up the yard and with it the matting sail, found it easy enough to get in position, and in five minutes more, as he drifted rapidly down with the stream, he had the mat sheeted home, and an oar over the stern for rudder. With the evening breeze quite sufficient for the purpose, he found himself gliding rapidly down the river, able to steer while lying down upon his back pretty well out of sight, and not a sound behind announcing that there was any pursuit.

'Hah!' he panted out at last. 'They'll have to come fast to catch me now. I wonder how far that poor fellow has to go before he can get help and another boat. Oh! if it would only turn dark, I could escape.

'What's that?' he ejaculated, raising his head; for there was a loud smack as if something had struck one of the planks of the boat, and he turned cold with a despairing feeling, being sure that something had happened to check his flight.

But three or four more sharp spangs on the bottom of the craft enlightened him directly after, and he

bore smilingly upon his oar so as to give a junk anchored in the river a wide berth, thinking the while of the shore lower down and a fire, if it was to be had, at which he could try his hand at cooking; for he knew with joy in his heart that the noise was made in the expiring efforts of what he meant to be his supper trying to leap over the side and failing dismally.

'Hah!' sighed Stan again. 'I never saw it turn dark so rapidly before. In another few minutes it will be impossible for any one to see me from the shore.'

In fact, as he glided abreast of the anchored junk he saw a man busy at work hoisting a great round yellow paper lantern to the mast-head, too busy to pay any heed to him; and soon after he could see light after light beginning to dot the broad surface of the stream.

'I'm going to escape,' cried the poor fellow exultantly. 'Oh, if I only can!'

Flap! said the fish softly, turning his thoughts into another groove.

'Yes, I hear you,' said Stan. 'Fish—roast fish must be as good as fried. I wonder whether there's a lantern anywhere on board. If there is there'll be—— Hooray! I've got my little silver box of matches in my revolver-pocket. I only wish I had my pistol too. But even if I hadn't got the matches, I could glide up quietly to one of those boats, lower down and steal a lantern in the dark, and slip away.

'Steal! Yes, steal,' he said, laughing bitterly. 'That's the way these things grow. I begin by stealing the Chinese soldiers' prisoner; then I steal

a boat with a lot of fish; and now I'm thinking quite coolly of stealing a lantern. Who'd ever have thought that I should turn out such a thief?'

The fish gave one more flap, and lay still in the bottom of the boat like something of silver very dimly seen.

'I'm horribly hungry,' muttered Stan; 'but the boat goes splendidly, and I'll eat some of that fish raw before I'll run her ashore to make a fire. Why not? I dare say it wouldn't taste bad, and I only want just enough to keep me alive. I shall eat a piece as soon as it's quite dead.'

An hour later he was tasting raw fish for the first time, and finding that it tasted very fishy indeed, but not more so than a big oyster just torn from its newly opened shell.

CHAPTER XVII.

'WHAT'S THE MATTER?'

THE night proved to be brilliant, for the moon was nearly at its full, so that, the wind being favourable and the current swift, sunrise the next morning found the fugitive far beyond pursuit. There was not a boat in sight, and as far as he could see on either side stretched the wide open country, from the winding river's banks right away to the distant hills; and when at times as the day wore on, with the boat gliding down fast, any craft came in sight, Stan had his choice of sides to take on the great river, and naturally he hugged the shore opposite to that taken by the trading-junk or smaller boat. Now and then he could see farm-buildings or clusters of village cottages, with an occasional pagoda. Once he passed a more pretentious collection of houses, like a small town, but it was some distance up a stream that joined the river; and as he sailed farther on, it was into cultivated land where traces of inhabitants were very few. Towards evening he took advantage of the fact that there was neither house nor boat in sight to run his little craft ashore where a patch of woodland came right down to the stream; and here in an opening he collected sufficient dead branches and twigs to make a fire, whose smoke was

diffused among the boughs overhead, feeding it well till there were plenty of glowing embers, over which he roasted the best of his fish. He spent an hour or so in eating heartily and, after roasting, cooling down enough in a pot he found in the boat so as to have an ample supply for the next two days.

Grilled fish and cold river water seemed to ask for something else, but Stan had plenty of strong young appetite, and he was ready to congratulate himself upon having done so well; and in excellent spirits he quenched the fire with the water-pot when he had done, and pushed off at once.

That late afternoon and evening he sailed on till the moon was right overhead, when, feeling more secure, he made fast to a tree; and utterly unable to battle against an overpowering feeling of drowsiness, he slept in the bottom of the boat, with the matting sail for cover, till the morning sun was well up.

That day, as he was passing a solitary house about a hundred yards from the bank, where he could see a couple of women at work in an enclosed field, he ran the boat inshore, the women in answer to his signs coming to the bank to stare at him. Then by means of the little Chinese he knew, and the offer of the figured white silk neckerchief he wore in exchange, he not only obtained a good supply of cake-bread and some eggs, but the women made him some tea before he pushed off again.

Encouraged by his success, he fished the next day, had excellent sport, and bartered some of his prizes at a house for a couple of dozen fine potatoes, whose fate it was later on to be roasted in the embers of one of his fires.

And in this fashion, without any noteworthy experience, Stan dropped down the river, losing count of the days in the monotony of the journey, but always obtaining a sufficiency of provisions of some kind or another in exchange for the plentiful supply of fish he caught in the evenings after sundown, or else for some portion of his clothes—for his watch, money, and knife had disappeared in the prison, he never knew how.

In fact, the escape down the river, under the happy circumstances which fell to his lot, was simple in the extreme, it being easy enough to avoid the boats and junks he met, as well as the more inhabited parts of the shore.

He kept a sharp lookout during the last three days, expecting every hour to catch sight of the great *hong* towering up by the right bank of the river; but it was far longer than he expected before it appeared, and even then proved to be much more distant than he could have believed.

At last, however, there it was, with a river-boat drawn up to the wharf, and by degrees he made out one of the big coolies; then Lawrence, the foreman, came out of the office door, but he took no notice of the white figure in the little native boat when Stan stood up and waved his hand.

'Why, I should have thought he would have known me directly,' grumbled Stan to himself. 'Ah! now we shall see,' he cried joyously as a tall familiar figure came out, crossed the wharf, and stood talking to some one in the river-boat.

Stan waved his hand so excitedly now that he was seen, and he noted that the tall figure shaded

its eyes and then turned to speak to one of the boatmen, who hurried in through the door of the warehouse and returned with something which the tall figure held up to its eyes.

'He'll see me now,' said Stan to himself.

He was right, for the next minute a hand was being waved by the manager, who stood ready to exchange grips with Stan as he ran his boat up alongside the wharf and stepped ashore.

That evening was passed in the relation of adventures and a discussion about the fate of Wing.

'I'm afraid—very much afraid—that he was killed by the savages,' said Stan sadly at last.

'Savages—cowardly savages!' cried Blunt angrily. 'But I don't know; old Wing is a very slippery gentleman, and knows his way about pretty well. I'm not going to give him up for a bad job yet.'

'You think he has escaped?' said Stan excitedly.

'I hope so,' was the reply. 'Things are not so bad as they might have been. You see that amongst the soldiery there is a feeling of respect for the English name.'

'Respect!' cried Stan indignantly. 'You don't fully grasp how they treated me.'

'Yes, I do, Lynn; for they didn't kill you, and with people who hold life so cheaply that is saying a great deal. Well, my lad, it has been an adventure that you will never forget, and I'm very glad you have escaped so well. You don't feel much the worse for it all?'

'Not in the least. But it's delightful to get to civilisation again, and I'm looking forward to lying in a clean bed once more. I shall sleep to-night after what you have said about Wing.'

'I suppose so. But I say,' continued Blunt dryly; 'wouldn't you have liked to bring that monkey away with you?'

'I should,' cried Stan eagerly.

'Yes, of course; but it's as well not. I know those chaps. They're wonderfully strong and vicious. Only safe in a cage. We couldn't have done with him here. I say, shouldn't you like to make one with me in an expedition to knock that prison to pieces?'

'Yes,' cried Stan eagerly. 'Could it be done?'

'Yes, if we went to war; but I dare say if proper application were made we could get compensation. We shall see. I say, though, what about that gathering of war-junks you saw? Not piratical craft, were they?'

'I don't know,' replied Stan. 'I had thought no more of them. I thought more, however, of that poor boy's boat that I took.'

'Ah! that was a bit of an annexation. Never mind; I'll send it back to the Chinese merchants we deal with; they'll find out whom it belongs to.'

''Longs to,' said Stan slowly.

'Hullo!' cried Blunt. 'What's the matter? Feel ill?'

'Ill? I—— Oh, I can't help it; I'm so stupidly sleepy I can't keep my eyes open, and I could hardly understand what you said last—so dreadfully drowsy I don't know what to do.'

'I'll tell you,' said Blunt, smiling.

'Do, please. Go and bathe my face?'

'No,' said Blunt. 'Off with you and tumble into bed.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

'NOT A BIT DEAD.'

'WHAT will you do about poor Wing?' said Stan the morning after his return, when he was out on the wharf, all the better for bed, bath, and breakfast.

'Wait,' said Blunt, frowning.

'Wait? In such an emergency, with the poor fellow regularly murdered?'

'We don't know that yet, youngster,' said the manager. 'You did not see him murdered, and you did not see his body.'

'No; but'——

'Exactly; but I've known Wing longer than you have. He is a very quiet fellow, but he is full of resource, and being amongst his fellow-countrymen, I think it very doubtful about his having been killed.'

'I only hope you are right,' said Stan; 'but there was a desperate fight.'

'No—not desperate. You see that though you were one they looked upon as an enemy they did not kill you, and evidently never intended anything of the kind.'

'Well, no; I don't think they meant to kill me.'

'I'm sure they did not. If they had, they would

have done it. In fact, I hardly know why they took you at all. It seems to me more out of idle recklessness than anything else; a party of rough soldiery with nothing to do, and under very little control. They have some discipline, but it is very slight. It 's a rarity for them to get any pay, even when they are on duty. There seems to have been a detachment hanging about the gate of the city, doing as they pleased, and dependent upon the people coming in to the market for their supplies. They saw you, a stranger, passing the place; and as there was no one to check them, they followed and pounced upon you.'

'But what for?'

'Ah! what for? I can only place one construction upon the act.'

'And what is that?' asked Stan.

'The one you suggested.'

'I? I suggested none.'

'Yes—by your words. What did you say they did?'

'Nothing but behave to me in a very insulting way, and refuse to carry a message or fetch help.'

'Yes, they did.'

'Yes, I see what you mean. The insolent creatures! They treated me just as if I were another monkey.'

'To be sure; and made a show of you.'

'Yes,' said Stan, beginning to swell with indignation. 'Brought no end of people into the yard beyond the bars of the prison grating.'

'And who were the people?'

'Oh, I don't know. Rough-looking country-folk.'

'To be sure. People coming in from the country;

and if we knew the truth of the matter, depend upon it, they took some toll in some kind of provisions for giving them a peep at the Tchili monkey and the foreign devil they had caught.'

'Oh, I say, Mr Blunt, don't!' cried Stan quickly. 'It's horrible. It's so degrading.'

'Well, it was not pleasant, my lad,' said the manager, smiling; 'but you couldn't help its being degrading, and you gave them the slip.'

'But you'll send a report to my father and uncle, so that they can lay the matter before the Consul?'

'I will if you like; but if I do, it will be a very long business. It will be to maintain the English dignity, but only at the expense of a few poor wretches in a distant part of the country, who will be taken and bastinadoed—perhaps decapitated.'

'Oh! I don't wish that,' cried Stan quickly.

'Whether you wish it or not it will be done, to quiet the foreign settlers and traders and to keep up our prestige. It may be right, only the mischief is that the right men will not be punished.'

'What! not the soldiers?'

'No,' said Blunt; 'they'll escape for certain. The mandarins will never catch them.'

'Then I shouldn't like to feel that I had been the cause of the punishment of innocent people. But I do feel that such a crime as the murder of poor Wing ought not to go unpunished.'

'So do I,' said Blunt; 'and it must not. But, as I say, we don't know that he is dead yet.'

'But where is he?'

'I don't know. Let's wait a bit and see. It is quite possible that he is making his way back by

land, as the boat was sent home, and it may be days yet before we see him. It is quite as possible that we may not see him for a long time, for he will be afraid to show his face here on account of losing you.'

'But he 'll get to know that I escaped,' cried Stan.

'Some day, perhaps. Then he 'll come—delighted. Let 's wait, for it may be some days or weeks, hanging about as he will be in the country, which is terribly unsettled, as I have just learned, by a fresh incursion of pirates and disbanded soldiers. Wait, my lad—wait. By-and-by perhaps I may be able to come down heavily upon one of the up-country mandarins for compensation; but we shall see. China is a place where matters move very slowly, and law and order are very seldom at home. I don't like the news at all that I have been hearing about what is going on up-country. It hinders trade, too. I 'm very glad, however, that you are safely back, instead of being weeks wandering about from plantation to plantation.'

'Then you feel pretty sure that Wing is not dead?'

'No, not pretty sure,' replied Blunt; 'only very hopeful about his being alive. What do you think of that?'

'That I feel much better satisfied. It would have been bad enough if any poor servant of the *hong* had suffered, but horrible for Wing to have come to so sudden an end. I liked Wing.'

'So did—— So do I,' said Blunt, correcting himself. 'Cheer up. He 'll come along smiling some day, as soon as he hears you are back.'

Something happened much sooner than either of the Europeans at the *hong* anticipated.

The next day Stan talked a good deal with Lawrence, the foreman of the coolies, and several of the clerks about Wing's absence, and could not find one who believed that the man was dead.

'Unless he has fallen amongst pirates,' said Lawrence. 'That would be different. He had charge of you, and he lost you. *Ergo*, as the old fellow in Shakespeare says, he 's afraid to meet Mr Blunt. I should feel just the same if I were Mr Wing.'

Stan felt more encouraged still; and the very next morning, as he was going through the big warehouse, his attention was suddenly caught by a figure stepping out of a small *sampan* which had just reached the side after crossing the river.

'Hi! Mr Blunt!' cried Stan. 'Look through that window. Isn't that Wing?'

'Wing?' replied the manager thoughtfully as he bent down to examine the Chinese brand on one of a stack of tea-chests. 'Not likely yet. He has a long way to come overland.'

'But I 'm sure I saw him step out of a boat on to the wharf.'

'Hardly likely. These fellows look so much alike in their blue frocks and glazed hats. Where did you see him?—Why, hullo! Well done! It is he after all.'

For just then the object of their conversation came slowly in through the open door, ragged, worn out, and dejected, the very shadow of the trim, neat Chinaman familiar to Stan. Coming out of the

bright sunshine, he stood with puckered face blinking and looking about, and so weak and weary that he seemed to be glad to hold on by the first pile of bales he reached.

There he stood, peering about till he dimly made out the tall, upright, unmistakable figure of the manager in his white garb, when he made a deprecating movement with his hands as if about to salaam like a Hindu, and he was in the act of bending down when he suddenly saw Stan.

In an instant the man's whole manner was changed. Throwing up his hands, he uttered a hoarse cry, and ran forward to throw himself upon his knees at the lad's feet, flinging his arms about his legs, and then burst forth into a fit of sobbing, crying like a woman, and the next minute laughing hysterically.

'Wing t'ink young Lynn go dead. Wing t'ink bad soljee man killee dead young Lynn. Oh deah! oh deah! Come along. Walkee allee way tellee Misteh Blunt. Ha, ha, ha! Allee light now. Give poo' Wing eatee dlinkee. Feel dleadful bad. Allee light now. Oolay! oolay! oolay!'

The poor fellow began his cheer fairly, but ended it in a miserable squeak, and then loosened his grasp of Lynn, and pressing his sleeve-covered hands to his mouth to stifle the hysterical cries struggling to escape, he began to rock himself to and fro; while Stan, who felt touched by the poor fellow's display of emotion, stood patting his shoulder and trying to calm him.

'No, no, Wing; not a bit dead,' he said, with a husky laugh. 'They took me prisoner and shut me up. Why, I've been thinking you were killed.

What became of you? How did you get away from the brutes?'

'Wing tellee soon. Wing tellee soon. Allee chokee chokee. Got floatee velly full. Makee cly like big boy so glad young Lynn allee 'live.'

'Well, it makes me ready to laugh to find you're alive,' said Stan, though his features did not endorse his words. 'Here, tell us where you have been.'

'Evelywheh,' said the poor fellow. 'Bad soljee put big pitchfolks to Wing, makee lun away. Keep folly Wing. Wing tly come back. Soljee put pitchfolk to Wing back and dlive light away. Makee lun velly fass. Come light away tell Misteh Blunt. Allee way soljee, allee way pilate. Wing wantee lie down and die. Wantee come tellee young Lynn plisneh. Wing t'inkee nevah get back to *hong*. Come at las' find young Lynn allee 'live. Wing leady lie down die now.'

The poor fellow sank over sideways as he said the last words very feebly, and it was quite evident that he was not very far from death's door through his exhaustion.

'Poor beggar!' said Blunt gruffly. 'There's no deception here. Get something out for the poor fellow at once, Lawrence. Look at him; he must have suffered horribly. He looks as if he has been travelling night and day. My word! I'll never think him a coward again. Fancy coming to meet me with such news as that! I should have been ready to kill him if it had been true.'

CHAPTER XIX.

'BIG JUNK BOAT.'

OOR Wing lay for about a couple of hours, during which everything possible was done, and then he began to recover rapidly, when, after superintending, the manager insisted upon the poor fellow doing nothing but try and sleep.

'Wing wantee tell Misteh Blunt evelyting,' he said, with a piteous look.

'Not now,' said Blunt sharply. 'Get well first.'

'Allee velly dleadful,' said the poor fellow feebly.

'Yes, I know; but I'm not going to blame you, my man. You did your best. Get strong again, and tell me all about the troubles then.'

Wing gave him a horrified look, glanced at Stan and then back at Blunt, his countenance looking drawn and his complexion more sallow than ever, while his lips moved as if he was speaking, but no sound came.

'Well, why don't you rest?' cried Blunt. 'What's the matter with you? Been so much frightened?'

Wing nodded sharply, and gave Stan a look full of horror and despair.

'Why, what's the matter with the fellow? Not been wounded, have you?'

Wing shook his head.

'Why don't you speak?' cried Blunt, so roughly that the man held out his hands in a gesture evidently intended to mean deprecation. It was as if he meant to say, 'Don't be angry with me; it is not my fault.'

'Well, I see you're upset, my man,' cried the manager, softening his manner. 'Perhaps you had better ease your mind. Speak out. Now then, what's the matter? Have you lost the money I gave you?'

'No, no, no,' cried Wing, shaking his head violently. 'Velly solly—velly solly,' he murmured.

'Very sorry for what?' cried Blunt, catching the man's arm and looking at him sternly.

Wing, who seemed weak in the extreme, shivered as he shrank from the manager's eyes, and turned appealingly to Stan as if begging him to intercede.

'The poor fellow doesn't seem to know what he is saying,' said Stan quietly, 'and he's frightened of you.'

'Humph!' replied Blunt. 'I thought I spoke gently enough to him.—Here, Wing, don't look at me in that scared way. I told you that I was not going to blame you. Speak out. What is it? You have something else to say?'

The man nodded.

'Bad news?'

Wing nodded again sharply.

'Out with it, then, and let's know the worst.'

The trembling Chinaman hesitated for a few moments more, and then pressed up towards his chief and whispered something quickly in his ear.

'What!' roared the manager, catching him fiercely

by the shoulders and making the poor fellow utter a piteous wail as he turned to Stan as if for help.

'Wing can't help,' he cried. 'Wing no want tell baddee news.'

'Then you've brought bad news?' said Stan excitedly.

'Velly bad news. Wing can't help. T'ink bes' come tell Misteh young Lynn dead and allee bad news.'

'Yes, yes,' said Stan impatiently.—'The poor fellow's half-frightened out of his wits, Mr Blunt. You're too harsh with him now he's in such a weak state.—Look here, Wing; it's all right. You see matters are not so bad. I'm not hurt, and Mr Blunt does not blame you.'

'But Wing can't help,' pleaded the poor fellow. He waved his hands and looked round at the clerks and warehousemen, who were drawing up wondering why their chief had seized the returned agent so fiercely; while some of his fellow-countrymen also began to draw near, the sight of 'the Boss,' as they called him, apparently about to punish one of them being irresistible, and whispers ran round in two languages, Anglo-Saxon and the base alloy known as 'Pidgin,' inquiring what Wing had done.

There was silence now for quite half-a-minute, during which time the pressure of the manager's hands, or that of poor Wing's feelings, had the effect of squeezing out a few tears, which swelled and swelled till they were big enough to roll over the man's eyelashes and find their way into a couple of curved creases which made his mouth look as if it had been placed between parentheses.

Down these gullies in the Chinaman's skin the tears ran till they dripped from his chin, and possibly it was the sight of them that brought Blunt out of his stern fit of thinking, for he suddenly loosed his hold and dropped his hands to his sides, saying hoarsely:

'Now then, say that out aloud for every one to hear.'

'Wing speakee quitee loud?' said the Chinaman, rolling his head slowly like a ball in its socket, as if he were trying to find out where any damage had been done to the mechanism.

'Yes; let's have it. Look sharp.'

Evidently satisfied that none of his vertebræ were damaged, a look of satisfaction smoothed the wrinkles in Wing's face, which became round again, and in place of the painful parenthetic curves, pleasantly mirthful lines began to appear; his eyes became two diagonal slits with something twinkling between the edges, and he reached up both hands to take hold of his ribbon-tied pigtail, which he gave a whisk to right and left before he let it fall down between his shoulders.

'Misteh Blunt wantee Wing tell evelybody whole tluth?'

'Yes; and be sharp about it,' was the angry reply.

'Misteh Blunt no knockee Wing head on tea-box, makee sore?'

'No, I shall not touch you again, however bad the news is,' said the manager gravely.

'Misteh Blunt plomise like gentleman no killee poo' Chinaman?'

'No, I tell you! Now then, out with it! But

mind this: if what you say is not true, sir, you may make tracks out of this place, and never show your face here again.'

'Yes,' said Wing calmly enough. 'Make tlack an' lun away velly fass.'

'For look here, sir; if you create a bad scare to frighten every one here you deserve to be hung.'

'Flighten me too. Flighten velly much. But Misteh Blunt no hang poo' Chinaman?'

'As sure as I'm here, I will, sir—by your pig-tail'——

Wing's hand went up to the black appendage, and he took hold and gave it a gentle pull as he glanced at Stan, to say softly:

'Make poo' Chinaman cly. Oh deah! oh deah! Misteh Blunt hang Wing up so?'

'Yes, to the crane, and give you a few dips in the river to wash the lies out of you.'

'Wing no got tell lie. Allee velly tlue. Gleat tlouble come. Soljee gleat many up livah-side; pilate man gleat many up livah. Big junk. Allee buln missionaly house, killee foleign devil, killee evelybody. Buln village, pull up tea-bush, stealee tea-box, buln go-down. Gleat many fightee; cuttee float, dlown. Oh, velly, velly dleadful up livah! Wing lun away, come tell Misteh Blunt, evelybody. Come down livah velly soon.'

'Nice bit of news this, Mr Lynn,' said Blunt, turning his frowning face to Stan, who noted that there was a fierce, lowering glow in the half-shut eyes.

'Yes,' replied the lad; 'but perhaps very much exaggerated.—Here, Wing, is all this quite true?'

'Oh, allee quitee tlue. Wing nevah tellee big

thumpy. Too much 'flaid Misteh Blunt find out. Knock down.'

'One reason for telling the truth,' said Blunt bitterly. 'But that is quite true; I should if I found him out.'

'Plenty man lun away up to mountain; soljee, pilate come lob house, buln evelyting up. Shoot bang. Wing, only lun away like evelybody.'

'I 'm afraid it 's all true,' said Blunt sombrely.

'Eh? No!' cried Wing excitedly. 'Blunt tell big lie now; not 'flaid a bit. Makee Chinee pilate muchee flighten. Makee lun away.'

'Perhaps,' said the manager grimly. 'But how far away are these people, Wing?'

'Come velly soon. Big junk sail down livah. Wing see um.'

'Well, you all hear?' said the manager sternly. 'No; you are not all here. Call every one. I want everybody to hear how we stand.—You, Wing, if you 're well enough, get all the Chinamen together.'

Wing went off to the far end of the warehouse and wharf, one of the clerks to the offices, and in a few minutes every man, European and Asiatic, was present, and heard of the threatened attack; after which the manager looked in Stan's direction and said sharply:

'There! you have all heard how we stand, and there are two courses open. One is to crowd on board the river-boat and set all sail down to the port, and get out to sea and coast along north for Hai-Hai.'

'No gettee big junk boat,' cried Wing excitedly. 'Capen velly muchee flight. Pull up anky. Lun away. Misteh Blunt lookee.'

The manager glanced sharply at the window, and, true enough, there was the junk with all sail set, gliding down the river, and now a quarter of a mile away.

'Hah!' ejaculated the manager, giving one foot an angry stamp. 'That settles one plan. No; we could collect some small boats if we had time. But the other course is to barricade the place, leaving loopholes, and fight to the last. We might beat them off. Now, I am manager here, and responsible for everything, but I feel that I have no right to call upon any man to risk his life against these murderous wretches. But I should like to hear Mr Lynn's opinion.—This place is the property of your uncle and father, sir, and if we give it up without striking a blow, by to-morrow morning the valuable store of tea and silk, with the building, will be only a heap of ashes. What is your opinion about the matter, Mr Lynn?'

'It seems very horrible,' said Stan, with something like a shudder.

'Very, sir,' replied Blunt rather sarcastically.

'If we escape in boats we shall save all our lives.'

'Perhaps,' said Blunt bitterly. 'Likely enough, though, we shall be pursued by half-a-dozen junks or so, and shot down or sunk before we could reach the banks; while if we took refuge ashore'——

'Pilate lun afteh evelybody, choppee head off.'

'Most probably,' said the manager, smiling.—'Now, Mr Lynn, you hear the state of affairs.'

'Yes,' said Stan, speaking with a slight quiver in his voice; 'but I don't like to give my opinion. There was, as you know, an attack made upon our

place, and my father and uncle fought hard to save it, even when the enemy set it on fire. They held out'——

'They? Didn't you help them, sir?'

'Yes, a little,' replied Stan; 'and the enemy were kept off till help came from the city. If we defend this place for a time, is it likely that help will come?'

'Not a bit,' said the manager. 'There is no help to be got here for above a week.'

'But I don't think my father and uncle would wish these people here to run such a fearful risk as to fight for the place against terrible odds.'

'Sooner lose about ten thousand pounds' worth of tea, dyewoods, and silk that I have been hard at work collecting with the help of Mr Wing here?'

'Yes,' said the Chinaman, nodding his head like an image. 'Velly much money. Velly dleadful let pilate man come and buln. Aha, ha, ha! Ayah, ayah, ayah!'

Stan stared. It seemed as if the poor fellow had suddenly gone mad; for after uttering a series of piercing yells, evidently intended for a war-whoop, he clapped his hands together as hard as he could, and then made a run at a big, half-nude coolie, whom he caught by the waist, twining his arms round him, and, to the astonishment of all present, lifted him from the floor and tried to throw him.

But Wing had reckoned without his host. He was a plump, soft man, unaccustomed to hard work, while the adversary he sought to overthrow was tough-muscled and hard, besides proving to be an adept at wrestling. Instead of falling, he came

cleverly down upon his feet, attacked in turn, and before any one had time to interfere in poor Wing's favour, there was defeat, the latter being hurled staggering backward; while with a yell the man who had freed himself made a dash, vaulted through the window, ran across the wharf, jumped down into a boat, cut the rope which held it swinging in the river, and thrust it forth into the stream, where he seized a long oar and began to paddle the boat along.

As Wing recovered himself he shouted to the coolies to follow, and made for the door.

'No; stop!' said the manager sternly. 'The fellow would have got too long a start before we could get a boat off. Let him go. Why, it's that new man I took on a few days ago.'

'Yes,' said Wing, shaking his fists in the air. 'Baddee man, got blue malk on alm. Come spy, see how muchee tea, silk in go-down. Lun away now tell pilate. Misteh Blunt no askee Wing whetheh new man good man. Wing su'e spy pilate come to see.'

'Yes; I made a mistake there,' said Blunt bitterly; and as Stan watched the escaped man and saw him lay down his oar and hoist a matting sail, which filled at once and sent the boat gliding away up-stream, he suddenly became aware of the fact that Blunt had disappeared.

But the next minute he was back with a rifle in his hand, busily thrusting in a cartridge.

'Are you going to shoot him?' said Stan huskily as he saw the manager drop on one knee, lay the rifle-barrel across the window-sill, and take aim.

'If I can,' said the manager gruffly. 'Why not?'

'It seems so cold-blooded: an unarmed man.'

'It may mean our lives or his, sir.'

'Yes, but'——

'Very well,' said the manager roughly; 'but we needn't argue the point. Look there at the man's artfulness. Or rather, don't look, for you can't. I shouldn't hit him if I tried. It takes a good shot to hit so small a mark as a hand in a fast-sailing boat—eh?'

'Yes,' said Stan, with a feeling of relief, for he felt a horror of seeing the poor wretch flying for his life shot down.

'An Englishman wouldn't have thought of that,' continued Blunt as he rose from his knee and let the butt of his rifle rest upon the floor, while all watched the cunning of the escaped spy, who was now lying down in the boat, holding the sheet of the sail with his left hand, and the steering-oar with his right, nothing of him being visible but the fingers which grasped the oar.

'Now then,' said Blunt sternly, 'we have settled nothing. What is it to be, Mr Lynn? You are the governor's son: is it to be run for our lives like cowards and, if we escape, face the principals with the best tale we can tell, or fight?'

'If we defend the place and are not able to beat them off, I suppose they will burn the *hong* and us in it?'

'Most likely,' said Blunt savagely; 'but some of them will not live to see the flames rising. I'm afraid you don't want to fight, Mr Lynn.'

'I don't,' said Stan frankly. 'The idea of shedding a fellow-creature's blood is horrible.'

'Yes, of course,' said Blunt, with something like

a sneer. 'You ought to jump into one of the boats yonder and run down-stream as hard as you can to fetch help if the warehouse is to be saved.'

'Yes, that would be grand. I could have a boat?'

'Oh yes, you can have a boat.'

'Wing get boat. Wing hoise sail, stee' boat beautifully.'

'I could bring back a lot of armed men to your assistance,' said Stan eagerly.

'To be sure,' said Blunt coolly. 'Only you 'll have to be pretty sharp about it.'

He turned his back upon the lad and took a step towards the excited group of men, who were talking hurriedly in whispers.

'Now, my lads,' he said, 'we can't give up this place to a mob of savages without making a bold defence for the sake of our employers. Some of you will, I hope, stick to me, but others will like to get out of the scrimmage. So those of you who have no stomach for a fight had better join Mr Lynn here, who is going off to Hai-Hai to fetch help.'

'No, I am not,' said Stan quietly.

'What! Why, you said you were.'

'I said I should like to,' said Stan, 'but I said so without thinking of the distance. I see now that it would be impossible to get help in time.'

'Quite, sir,' said the manager, staring at the lad. 'Well, at all events you are going off in the boat with Wing.'

'Indeed I am not,' said Stan, speaking slowly and thoughtfully. 'It seems to me that we must make as brave a defence as we can. We may be able to beat off the enemy.'

'Then you mean to stay?' cried the manager, his eyes lighting up.

'Of course.'

'And fight?'

'As well as I can,' said Stan rather sadly; 'but I don't think I shall'——

He got no farther, for his words were drowned by a loud cheer given heartily by the little band of European employees; while the strong gang of sturdy coolies and native workpeople, taking it for granted that they ought to follow their white fellow-workers' example, cheered lustily as well.

'Do I understand you to mean that you will stop with us and fight it out?' said Blunt.

'Yes.'

'Don't be deceived. Do you understand the danger?'

'I think I do.'

'You don't, my lad, and I will not keep it back from you. Fight with Europeans, and if you are beaten you are taken prisoners; fight with the lower order Chinese, and you will have a set-to with some of the most savagely unmerciful people on the face of the earth. You had better think again. It may mean lying wounded and seeing the flames creeping towards you while you can't raise hand or foot to get away.'

'Don't talk like that, Mr Blunt, please,' cried the lad, 'or you'll make me a greater coward than I feel I am.'

'I want you to know what you may expect to meet,' said the manager coldly.

'But I don't want to know. I know more now than I can bear.'

'Then you will go?'

'Yes, if you do,' cried Stan eagerly.

'I 'm going to stay and do my best to save the place and goods I have in my charge, Mr Lynn,' said the manager sternly.

'And I 'm going to help you, then,' said Stan quietly.

'Do you mean it, in spite of all I have said?' cried Blunt.

'Yes.'

Stan's hand was seized in such a grip that he flinched and the blood flushed into his cheeks.

'Thank you, my lad,' cried the manager hoarsely.

'I can't say thank you,' said Stan, whose face was twitching from the pain he felt. 'I say, don't shake hands again like that.'

'Hurt?'

'Horribly.'

'I beg your pardon, then. But look here: 'pon my word, Mr Lynn, I don't understand you a bit. For the last ten minutes I 've been thinking that you were a downright coward.'

'That 's quite right,' said Stan quietly; 'I am. My hands are all of a tremble.'

'Well, then, all I can say is that you 're the most curious coward I ever saw.'

'That 's because you are right in what you said, Mr. Blunt. You don't understand me a bit.'

'Ah, well! perhaps I shall by-and-by,' said the manager.

Wing had disappeared during the above little verbal passage, but just then he reappeared, in time to be of use.

'You, Wing, come here,' cried the manager. 'I

shall want you directly.—Now, gentlemen,' he continued, turning to the European employees, 'you have been here long enough to know what a fight with a party of Chinese pirates means—hard blows and no quarter. Now 's your time: any of you who feel that you have not stomach for such an encounter will only be in our way here. There 's a boat ready to take you down-stream. Step out, all who want to go.'

Quite half the men took a step or two forward, but the others stood fast.

Then after a whisper and several uneasy glances back at their companions, one of the forward party acted as spokesman.

'You see, Mr Blunt, sir,' he said, 'we don't feel that we should be at home fighting. We are clerks and writers, warehousemen. We all think'——

'No, we don't,' growled one of the men who had stood fast.

'But you all agreed just now that it would be better to chance it and go.'

'Yes, a bit back,' said another of the men; 'but six of us here, after seeing you step out, feel as if it would be un-English to sneak off and leave Mr Blunt and the young partner in the lurch. You fellows look as if you are ashamed of yourselves.'

'That 's about what I am,' said one of the party with the spokesman. 'I 'm going to stop.'

As he said these words he stepped back into the rear rank.

'Same here,' said another; and he too dropped back.

'Oh, I say,' said another; 'it 's shabby to leave us here like this.'

'Shabby? It's dirty,' cried the spokesman. 'I wouldn't have said what I did for all of you if I'd known. Hang me if I'm going almost alone!'

'Nor I—nor I,' cried two others.

'In for a penny, in for a pound,' cried another man. 'I'm not going in the boat.'

Stan forgot his own nervousness, and burst out laughing, at which the whole party of Europeans broke out into a cheer.

'Thank ye, my lads,' said the manager in his grimmest way. 'I did feel a bit puzzled.—Now then, Wing, tell the coolies and the rest that we're in for a big fight. They'll understand you better than they will me. Tell them that every one who doesn't mean to stand by us can go off in the boat with you. Be fair with them, and tell them that there'll be a lot of bad fighting.'

Wing nodded, and made a most animated speech to his yellow-looking, sun-tanned audience, who received it with a series of grunts.

'What do they say, my man?'

'Say wantee big fight. Shalpen knives and cuttee lot heads off.'

'You didn't make them understand how dreadful it is going to be.'

'Yes; said velly dleadful—pilate kill plenty men.'

'Tell them again.'

Wing spoke to the little crowd, and as he finished the coolies set up a tremendous shout.

'What do they say now?' cried Blunt.

'Say don'tee ca'e half mandalin button fo' all pilate on livah.'

'Well done!' cried the manager. 'What else?'

'Allee wantee fight velly bad. Knife all cuttee cuttee like lazo'. Wantee shave bad man head off.'

'Then they mean to stop and back me up?'

'Yes. Say kill plenty mo'e pilate. No habbee big fightee long time ago, and say Wing go in boatee all alonee and get out way.'

'Off with you then, my man,' cried Blunt; 'they're quite right. You'll be in the way.—Well, do you hear?'

Wing nodded.

'Not go 'long till Misteh young Lynn quite leady.'

'But don't you understand? Mr Lynn is going to stop and fight.'

'Yes. Wing stop take ca'e of um.'

'What!' cried Stan, laughing.

'Yes. Wing tellee old Lynn and Uncle Jeffley takee gleat ca'e young Lynn. How takee gleat ca'e if Wing lun away in boat? Wing go 'top along takee ca'e young Lynn.'

'No, no, Wing. You had better go and get out of danger,' said Stan warmly.

'Young Lynn talkee talkee big piecee nonsense stuff. Wing go back in boat Hai-Hai; Uncle Jeff say, "Hullo, you! What double dickens you do along young Lynn?" What Wing say? "'Top topside house fightee fightee." Misteh Olivee say, "Why Wing not 'top topside house fight too, kill pilate, bling young Lynn quite safe?" Misteh Olivee old Lynn quite light. Wing no go lun away in boat. Young Lynn come, Wing go. Young Lynn no go, Wing 'top along takee ca'e young Lynn.'

'Stop, then,' cried the manager abruptly, 'and let's see whether you can fight.'

'Yes,' said the Chinaman coolly enough. ''Top 'long young Lynn. Fight muchee. Kill plenty pilate.'

'There! we've all talked enough,' cried the manager, turning up his sleeves. 'Now then for work.—You, Wing, go right up to the top of the big warehouse and watch the river. As soon as you see the tip of a junk-sail you'll give us warning.'

'Misteh Blunt lendee Wing two-eye pull-out glass?'

'My double telescope? Yes, take it; and mind you let us know in time.—Now, Stan Lynn, we've got some man's work to do. You can't afford to be a boy any longer. This way.—Now, my lads, follow on. If the bloodthirsty wretches will only give us plenty of time they shall have such a reception as will open their diagonal slits of eyes.'

Five minutes later Wing was perched at the very top of the great warehouse, with his eyes glued to Blunt's lorgnette, and his blue cotton frock filling out in the breeze and shrinking again in the most grotesque fashion. One minute the Chinaman was blown out like a man in the transition state of turning into a balloon. The next minute he was convex one side, concave the other, while directly after he seemed to have been furnished with an enormously huge bun upon his shoulders. But he noticed neither wind nor sunshine; his eyes were strained up the main reach of the river, and the glass was sweeping bend after bend in search of the coming danger in the shape of the top of some tall matting junk-sail seen across the country where the great river pursued its serpentine course.

CHAPTER XX.

'NOW THEN, CARTRIDGES!'

THERE was an end to peaceful mercantile pursuits at the great warehouse and wharf, and all was hurry and bustle, but with little confusion, for Blunt had suddenly become military in his orders and issue of directions; while, full of excitement now, Stan dashed at the task in hand, proving himself a worthy lieutenant to the fighting manager. The men began busily handling boxes and bales, and at first sight it seemed as if they were preparing to load a trading-junk with the contents of the storehouse, so actively were they engaged in bearing out silk-bales and tea-chests; but the pleasant herb which cheers but does not inebriate was to be put to a very different purpose.

'You take that job in hand, Lynn,' cried Blunt, 'and make the fellows plant the chests down right along the front, just as if you were building a wall of blocks of stone; but after the second row is placed, leave a loophole between every second and third chest so that we can fire through, while I set to work and make a breastwork with the silk-bales at every door and window. No bullets or shot that the enemy can fire will go through the soft, elastic silk.—Work away, my lads.'

Englishmen and Chinamen cheered together, and worked with might and main, every one feeling that it was a race against time, but growing lighter-hearted as they went on, the materials being so close at hand; and as they were brought down from above or taken from the huge stacks on the ground-floor, they were rapidly formed outside into a light but strong loopholed wall extending along the wharf and facing the sea. One easy enough to tear down, no doubt, if the enemy determinedly faced the storm of bullets poured upon them from the loopholes, but good enough to protect the defenders and keep the assailants in check for a time; while, when it began to yield, the besieged party had only to rush into the warehouse offices and dwelling, close and barricade the doors, to help to defend what formed the keep or stronghold of the mercantile fort, and continue the firing from behind the silk-bales advantageously placed as breastworks behind the first-floor windows, where they could fire down upon any of the pirates who tried to shelter themselves behind the tea-chest wall.

It was wonderful with what rapidity the wall and breastworks rose, while the Chinese carpenters, whose general work was the making of the chests, sawed and hammered away, barricading the lower windows, and placing planks ready for closing up the two doors that were left for temporary use.

'They'll never get past the chest wall,' panted Stan excitedly as Blunt came down from where he had been showing his men how to wedge the silk-bales together so as to stand tightly in the windows.

'Don't you be too sure, my boy,' said Blunt.

'They are regular fiends, these half-wild Chinamen, and they'll come swarming over the wall like monkeys.'

'And I thought it so strong that nothing but fire would have any effect upon it,' said Stan gloomily.

'Fire would have hardly any effect upon it,' said Blunt, 'unless there was a strong wind. The chests might burn, but the tea would only smoulder away.'

'I am disappointed,' said Stan, wrinkling up his forehead.

'Not a bit. I'm delighted with what you have done. It is strong, but a party of our sappers and miners would laugh at it all and say it was as weak as so much cobweb.'

'But I say, if they come, how will they attack?'

'Like civilised savages: pour in a hail of swivel-gun balls, scrap-iron, and pebbles from the junks till they land, and then come on with spears, pitchforks, tridents, and swords. Some of them will have long *jingals*—matchlocks, you know—and no doubt muskets and rifles as well. Then, too, I dare say they will bring plenty of stink-pots to throw—earthen jars full of burning pitch. We shall have a high old time of it, Stan, my lad, as soon as the fight begins.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Stan suddenly, with a look of dismay.

'Hullo!' cried Blunt, looking at his companion in a peculiar way. 'Beginning to think it will be too much of a good thing?'

'No—o—o—o!' cried Stan angrily. 'That I wasn't. I was thinking of the stink-pots.'

'Well, of course they'll stink, as 'tis their nature to,' said Blunt merrily.

'Of course they will; but burning pitch—it will stick.'

'Pitch has a habit of doing so, my son,' said Blunt mockingly.

'Oh, you don't see what I mean,' cried Stan excitedly. 'The warehouse—wood—they'll set the whole place on fire and burn us out.'

Phee—ew!

Blunt gave forth a long-drawn whistle.

'By Saint Jingo, the great fighting-man,' he cried, 'I never thought of that. Stan Lynn, you're a regular Todleben—a prince of engineering defence. Why, of course! They'd roast us out, and it would hurt horribly, without reckoning how they would poke us back with their tridents to go on cooking if we tried to run away.'

'You see now, then?' said Stan.

'See? Yes. I can almost feel. I am glad you thought of that. All right. We'll have half-a-dozen casks in the middle of the big office, and I'll set a line of men to work across the wharf with buckets to fill the casks from the river.'

'So as to nip any little fire in the bud?' cried Stan eagerly.

'I don't see how you can nip a fire in the bud,' said Blunt, with sham seriousness.

'Oh yes, you can,' cried Stan laughingly. 'Nip it in the bud before it blossoms out into a big blaze.'

'Good boy, Stan! But the old people ought to have called you Solomon. Come on; let's get the men at work filling the water-casks, and then we'll serve out the firearms.'

In very few minutes the empty casks were in

place, and two lines of coolies at work dipping water from the edge of the wharf, passing it from hand to hand along one line to where it was emptied into the open casks, and sending the empty buckets back along the other line to be refilled.

'Goes like clockwork,' said Stan as he watched the men.

'Thanks to you, my lad,' said Blunt. 'Now then, let 's consult the oracle.'

'Eh?' asked Stan.

'Old Wing,' replied Blunt; and stepping outside, he hailed the Chinaman where he was perched upon the extremity of one gable, using the glass most energetically.

'Ahoy, there! Hullo, Wing!' shouted the manager. 'How many junks can you see, and how many pirates in each?'

'No see not one yet while,' cried Wing, lowering his glass. 'Velly, velly long time coming.'

'And a good job too, my man. Have you looked right out yonder where the river bends round?'

'Yes; Wing look evelywheh. No junk come yet.'

'That 's right. Keep on looking out.'

'You think junk full o' pilate come now?'

'Of course I do. Didn't you say they were coming?'

'Yes. Wing think allee junk come long ago.'

'Which means he is getting very tired of sitting perched up there,' said Stan, laughing.

'Yes; and we 're getting very tired of working down here, but it has to be done,' responded Blunt. Then aloud: 'Never mind what you expected, Wing; keep a sharp lookout all round, and don't miss the

enemy unless you want to have a sharp something round your neck, and your head off before you know it.'

'Yes, Wing look all alound. No wantee head choppee off by pilate man.'

'That's right,' said Blunt, turning away.—'Well, we are getting into a good state of defence even now, and of course we are bound to have a couple of hours' notice, unless the enemy make their attack in the dark.'

'In the dark?' said Stan, whom the idea quite appalled.

'Yes; they may wait till dark, and then drop down slowly with the stream. It will be bad for us if they do, but we must take things as they come; but I should like it to be daylight for our job.'

Stan felt ready to shiver, but he suppressed it.

'You see it is of no use to be nice about this bit of business, my lad,' said Blunt gravely. 'There'll be no compunction on the part of the enemy. They'll come on with the intention of massacring us all, and they'll do it if they can.'

'But they can't,' said Stan hoarsely.

'They shan't,' said Blunt; 'for, as I said, it will be no time for being nice. We've got to kill every one of the wretches if we can.'

'For the benefit of humanity,' said Stan eagerly.

'I suppose so, my lad, but principally for the benefit of ourselves. We want to live out our time, and we'll do it too, so we must shoot them when the game begins. There! don't let us talk about what may be; the pirates haven't arrived yet. All we've got to do is to be ready for them if they do come.'

'Then you think that perhaps, after all, they may not attack us?'

'No, I don't,' said Blunt in the roughest manner. 'I trust Wing—as far as one can trust a Chinaman—but it is always on the cards that the scare is not so bad as he made out. Now then, let's see about the shooting-tackle.'

Blunt led the way quickly, and with a decision in his step that showed how much he was in earnest, to the portion of the warehouse set apart for the arms-rack, chest, and the magazine.

'This is the sort of thing your people at Hai-Hai ought to set up,' said Blunt. 'I hinted at it when I was over there, but your father said so plainly that he preferred to trust to the police there that I said no more, only made up my mind that, as we have no police or protection of any kind here, I was quite right in being prepared for the worst. What do you say?'

'I hate the idea of using such things,' said Stan gravely, 'but it must be right here.'

'Of course; and you won't mind using a rifle?'

'I shall mind very much,' replied Stan, 'but I'm going to use one.'

'That's right. Here we are,' said Blunt, unlocking and raising the trap-door in the floor by its ring, and descending half-a-dozen steps into a bricked-in place with something resembling a wine-bin of three shelves on one side, in which were stacked a few boxes not unlike cases of wine.

'Here! let's have them out at once,' said Blunt, and he handed up to his young companion case after case.

'Set them on that big table,' he said. 'Mind be careful. I don't know whether if one were dropped the cartridges would explode, but I shouldn't like to try it. There you are; two cases for the rifles, and one for the revolvers. We'll leave the rest here, with the key in ready if wanted. Now for the tools themselves.'

He stepped out, closed the trap, and turned to the arms-rack.

'You, Stan, take to the arms-chest and open it ready. I'll serve out the rifles; you do the same with the revolvers.—Hi, you!' was shouted to one of the clerks busy helping to pass out more tea-chests for the continuation of the wall-building; 'pass the word for the men to come for their rifles.'

The order was given, and as the men filed up each received a Martini-Henry, bandolier, and revolver, afterwards proceeding to the big table to wait till the weapons were supplied to all who needed them.

'There you are,' said Blunt as the last one was supplied. 'Splendid new weapons that shoot perfectly straight if you hold them so. Now then, cartridges!'

Packets of large and small cartridges were handed to the men for rifle and revolver, several of them receiving instructions how to fit the little rolls of powder and lead into the clips of the bandoliers, before they marched out, ready for the great emergency, keeping their weapons with them now as they went on with their several duties of finishing the defences.

CHAPTER XXI

'WHY, HE'S ASLEEP!'

'THE enemy do not come, Lynn,' said Blunt a short time later, when they had both filled their bandoliers and pistol-pouches.

'And a good thing too, for we're hardly ready yet.'

'What! with our defences? Well, let's take a good look round and see what more there is to be done.'

It was getting late in the afternoon, and the westering sun was pouring down its rays with a violence peculiar to a Chinese summer, though the winters are so intensely cold that the people go about with clothes piled upon clothes, so that a wealthy man often resembles an animated feather-bed, and in fact has his garments so quilted with feathers and down that if picked to pieces, though he might not furnish enough for a bed, he could respectably fill a bolster and pair of pillows. There was very little breeze, and Blunt and his companion were longing for that which would come in the evening.

'Only there'll be a great drawback to it,' said Stan—'the darkness will come too.'

'Yes, the darkness will come too,' said Blunt

thoughtfully, for his eyes were wandering over the tea-chest defence-wall inside which they were walking; 'but,' he added in words which proved that his thoughts were not upon the darkness, 'I don't like that ending off. It's weak.'

'What! where it turns round the end of the warehouse?' replied Stan. 'Yes; the enemy might make for that corner and come round.'

'And attack us in the flank, as soldiers would say,' exclaimed Blunt. 'It won't do.—Here, three or four of you, get some more tea-chests out and build this end up higher. There ought to be quite a dwarf tower here.'

'No more chests, sir,' said the clerk addressed. 'We've used them all as far as they'd go.'

'Then use bales. Call up a dozen coolies, and build up a rounded corner as quickly as you can.'

'Yes, sir,' was the eager response, and the man addressed trotted off, followed by his comrades.

'Odd that we shouldn't have noticed that before. The corner at the other end is strong, and I meant in my hurried mental plans for this to be like it. Stopped, of course, by the material running out. Our weak spot, Lynn; and they say a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Our chain of defences—eh?'

'I hope we shall not find any more weak points,' replied Stan.

'Then we had better not look round any farther, my lad, for in this hasty knocking up of our defences we shall find plenty.'

'Let's know the worst,' said the lad warmly.

'Yes; we'll have no false confidence,' replied

Blunt; and they continued their inspection of the ground-floor with its two doors and the ample material ready for barricading them if the defenders were driven in. Then they ascended to the first floor, after standing aside for a few minutes to allow the bearers of the bales to pass along with their loads ready for making the little extemporised bastion at the end.

But they found no weak places upstairs. Every window had its protecting breastwork where a man could use his rifle in comparative safety and well cover the spots likely to be attacked.

'Capital,' said Blunt; 'far better than I expected. If the enemy do come, all I can say is that they will be mad to attack us, for they must leave scores of their party shot down before they could carry our outer wall. Now then, we'll go down and see how the corner is getting on; then hail Wing, and if he has nothing to report, we'll call the men together for a good hearty meal, and over it I'll tell off the different stations they are to occupy.'

'What are you going to do about giving orders when the firing begins?' said Stan. 'There'll be the noise of the guns and shouting.'

'This,' said Blunt, taking a large silver whistle from his pocket. 'I shall explain that when this whistle is blown all are to run towards the place from which the sound comes, so as to command plenty of strength in hardly-pressed places. Two shrill whistles mean, make for the upper windows.'

'Retreat?'

'Yes.'

'And what about barricading the two doors?'

'I shall station the two carpenters and four men at those doors, ready to close them up when necessary. Tut, tut, tut!'

'What's the matter?' said Stan, startled by his companion's ejaculations.

'In the hurry and excitement I haven't found time to say a few words to the Chinamen about fighting for us. Never mind; I'll have a few words with them over the supper, dinner, or whatever it is.'

They passed down and went outside on to the wharf, where, before inspecting the addition to their defences, they both looked up, and Blunt hailed Wing, who was still seated astride the gable, shading his eyes from the ardent sun and slowly sweeping the horizon.

'Well, Wing,' cried Blunt; 'see anything of the enemy?'

'No. Not come yet. Velly long time.'

'And a good job, too,' said Blunt to his companion, who, after another good look at the patient figure in the blue frock, crouching all of a heap and looking like a very amateurish beginner astride of a huge razor-backed horse, said:

'Don't let us forget to send the poor fellow up some tea and bread-cake. He must be half-famished.'

'So must everybody be,' said Blunt. 'I know I am. Here, how are you getting on, my lads?' he continued, turning to the working party.

'I think we've got on as far as we can, sir,' replied the clerk. 'I was hoping that you'd come soon and tell us what more to do. We've packed in nearly fifty bales, as you see.'

Blunt inspected the work in silence, with its double

wall loopholed, and with extra shelters for the men who would be firing therefrom, and finally stood thinking.

'Well,' he said to the men who were watching him anxiously, 'I can suggest nothing more. You have done your work admirably. So now knock off and come into the big store-room for refreshments.'

The men cheered and followed into the great place, which, minus its piles of tea-chests carried out to build the wall, looked vast; but the trestle and boards spread ready, and pretty well covered with a substantial tea by Blunt's Chinese servants, made the place look welcome in the extreme; and upon the men being bidden to fall to, Europeans and Asiatics set to work eagerly, talking, laughing, eating, and drinking, and more resembling a strange picnic party than a number of men expecting to be engaged at any hour in a desperate fight for their lives against a savage foe.

There were only two of those present who looked moody and were silent. These were Blunt and Stan, the former washing down his food with draughts of tea as with frowning brow he cogitated over his plans; the latter, now that the excitement of preparation was over, feeling a strange sense of sinking which the bread and tea did not remove. He wanted to preserve his firmness and show Blunt that he was no coward, but there was what seemed to be a dark mental cloud ahead, and in spite of every attempt to pierce it, there it hung ominously like a portent of what was to come, and as if fate was kindly hiding from him the horrors in store.

Stan set his teeth hard and made a tremendous effort at last.

'I must eat,' he said to himself, 'or I shall be as weak as a child, and I must drink to quench this horrible feeling of delirious thirst. Oh, I wish I wasn't such a weak coward! I'm sure no other fellows of my age can be like me.'

Forcing himself then, he began to eat and drink hurriedly, all the while recalling old school fights into which he had entered with fear and trembling, but without recalling how he had come out.

Then all that he had read of Chinese horrors, and the indifference of these people to life, came floating before his eyes—anecdotes that he had read of their atrocities and savage treatment of their enemies—there they all were, till, instead of seeing any longer that black, cloud-like curtain, the lad now seemed to be seeing red, and he started violently when his companion brought him to himself by suddenly rising and blowing his silver whistle. Then in the silence that immediately ensued Blunt explained his plans to his listeners, and had his words well interpreted to such of the Chinese workers as were not perfect in their knowledge of English.

Blunt spoke briefly, but every word of his instructions was to the point, and the listeners rose from their rough benches at last well drilled in their duties as to the places they were to occupy, the Europeans finding a leader to reply and declare how to a man they would fight to the death; while, when the manager had done, the head of the Chinamen rose and declared that his comrades thoroughly hated all pirates and murderers, and that to a man they too

would fight for the good, just master who always behaved to his men as if he were their father.

Blunt smiled and nodded, and then said a few words to the leader about his comrades having rifles. But these were declined, the Chinaman declaring that he and his fellows could do more good with their long knives and hatchets when the enemy came to close quarters; and this he said, as Stan noticed, with a fierce glow in his eyes which proclaimed that, in spite of the speaker being as a rule a mild-spoken, peaceful carpenter, there was Chinese Asiatic savage instinct beneath the skin—showing, too, that he and his fellows were going to prove themselves dangerous foes to the bloodthirsty enemy when they approached.

'Then now we all understand each other,' said Blunt sternly. 'I have only this more to say—that as soon as it is dark three parts of you will lie down to sleep. I shall place sentries to give the alarm if the enemy come on in the night. Then every man will run to his post, and Heaven help us all to do our best!'

A tremendous cheer greeted the close of Blunt's speech, and after giving all present a sharp gratified look, with a nod of the head, Blunt turned to his young companion.

'Come along,' he said. 'You and I will go and order poor Wing down, and keep a lookout from the little bastion while he comes and has his tea.'

'Yes, quick!' said Stan; 'my conscience has been smiting me all the time you were talking, but of course I could say nothing then.'

'Of course not. I had quite forgotten him. I had so much else to think about. Now then, take your

rifle. Here 's mine. We must make these our companions now.'

Stan obeyed the order he had received, following his companion's example as Blunt took his rifle from the corner where he had placed it; and together they stepped out into the shelter behind the wall, then climbed over on to the wharf, looked at the broad, clear river, bright in the evening glow, but with nothing visible to mar its peaceful beauty, and then as they reached the end of the wall—

'We shall have no enemy to-night,' said Blunt.

'Why do you say that?'

'Because we can see for miles, and there is not a sign of danger. They will not surprise us; they want daylight for their attack.—Ahoy, there! Wing! See anything?'

There was no reply.

'Look at that,' said Blunt, smiling. 'Nice sort of a sentry that!'

'Why, he 's asleep!' whispered Stan.

Asleep the poor fellow was, and no wonder. Duty to his employers had a strong hold, but nature and exhaustion, after hours of baking and fasting upon the roof with straining eyes, were stronger; and but a very short time before the appearance of his European masters, Wing's head, in spite of a desperate struggle to keep it firm, had begun to nod, then to make long, slow, graceful bows at the western sky, till at last, as if the strain upon his eyes in watching had affected the poor fellow's brain with an uncontrollable drowsiness, his head went right down, to rest between his knees. There he crouched as if in a saddle; and then he was motionless, and

looking wonderfully like a beautifully carved finial placed by a cunning builder as an ornament to the great gable-end.

'Poor beggar! It was too bad to leave him so long,' said Blunt. 'I suppose I mustn't bully him. But suppose the enemy had been coming down the river and had surprised us.'

'We should have been to blame for not having more sentries on the lookout.'

'Right, my young Solon,' said Blunt; 'but it would have been a startler for him, and a lesson too, if he had been woke up by a shot.'

'Yes, that 's right,' said Stan, smiling at a thought which flashed across his brain.

'What are you laughing at?' said Blunt sharply.

'I was thinking how it would make him jump if I fired a shot now.'

'Ah, to be sure! Slip a cartridge into your rifle and fire in the air.'

'I am loaded,' said Stan, who began to repent of his words.

'Of course. Fire away.'

'No, no; it would be too bad.'

'Fire—away!' said Blunt in a stern, angry tone; and feeling at once the impulse to obey, the lad held his rifle up pistol-wise at arm's-length, drew the trigger, and then, as the report rang out, winced at the kick the piece gave, and as the smoke rose, stared in horror at the result of his shot.

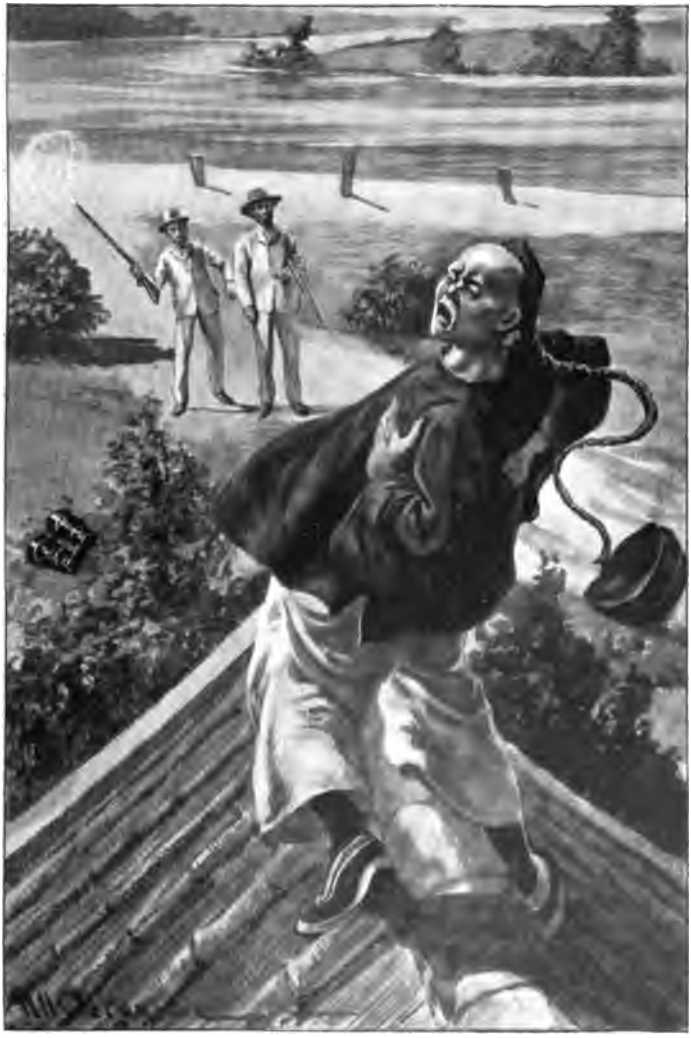
CHAPTER XXII.

''TOP LITTLEE!'

TAN LYNN had good reason to stare, for at the sharp report of the rifle poor Wing's aspect of being a part of the gable disappeared instantly. He sprang to his feet with one hand clapped to his chest, the other reaching round to his back, both busily searching for his wound, as he uttered a dismal cry.

The next moment both hands were in the air clutching for something to hold on by so as to save himself, but clutching in vain. For his foot as he stood erect had slipped on the sharp slope of the tiled gable-end, and in far less time than it has taken to describe the catastrophe, the poor fellow had fallen upon his back and was sliding rapidly down.

But he had not quite lost his presence of mind. Making a tremendous effort, he wrenched himself round so as to bring his chest underneath; and as he went on gliding down, Stan could see him striving hard to get a hold with his crooked fingers, which he vainly tried to drive in between the interstices of the tiles. They were too closely fitted, however, and it was not till he was three parts down that he was able to check his downward course.



Wing sprang to his feet with one hand clapped to his chest, the other reaching round to his back.

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'That's right!' shouted Blunt hoarsely, for, though Stan strove to speak, no sound came from his parched lips. 'Hold on; we'll soon help you.'

Then, turning to the first of the men, whom the report of the rifle had brought rushing out to make for their posts to repel the imaginary attack:

'Run up, some of you, with a rope. Get up on to the roof ridge and lower one of the men down to get hold of him.'

There was a rush back into the warehouse, but before half the men were inside, Wing's weight had proved to be too much for his fragile hold. He slipped suddenly and glided down sideways till one foot caught beneath the eaves, and he made here a desperate effort to save himself, brought his other foot alongside the first, with his soft heels in the gutter, and then tried to turn over to plant his toes where his heels rested; but he only succeeded in dislodging them, so that he came down with his crooked fingers clutching in the hollow, and there he held on.

'That's right; hold tight!' cried Blunt again. 'Help coming.'

Stan would have added his voice could he have found utterance, but he could only think and stand half-paralysed at the sight of the poor fellow swinging by his crooked fingers to the frail gutter.

Had he remained perfectly still, it is possible that he might have hung till some one descended to him with a rope; but most probably the Chinaman felt his fingers giving way, and before they were dragged from their hold by his weight he made one more desperate effort to perform an impossibility. For,

contracting his muscles, he slowly drew himself up by his arms till his chin was on a level with his hands, and meanwhile his toes were tearing at the wall to find a footing—trying, but finding not, for the soft boot-toes kept gliding over the wall beneath the eaves. Once by a desperate struggle he got what seemed to be a firm footing, but it was only to hasten the disaster, for all at once as those below gazed upward they saw that the poor fellow's knees were close up to his chest, and he hung like a stout package by his arms. At the same moment there was an encouraging shout, and one of the most active of the clerks, bearing a coil of rope, and followed by several more, appeared on the ridge.

'That's right,' roared Blunt. 'Be smart! Let yourself be lowered down. Hold hard, Wing!'

His words were supplemented by a shout from below, where half the employees of the warehouse were assembled, all impotent to render any assistance to the unfortunate sentry.

Instantly following the shout, which sounded to Stan as if meant derisively, the end came, for, as suggested, Wing's desperate effort only meant putting greater strain upon the fingers in the guttering, forcing them right off, so that he fell like a light bundle rapidly through the air fully thirty feet, and as he reached the bottom, passing out of sight behind the wall, but really to rebound about a couple of feet, and then lie all of a heap just inside the little bastion so lately made.

The dull thud which struck heavily upon Stan's ears acted like magic. The moment before the lad had stood looking upward feeling quite paralysed.

Then every nerve and muscle quivered, and, rifle in hand, he bounded to the bale wall, climbed over, and, wild with excitement, dashed to where poor Wing lay, to drop upon one knee by the sufferer, whom he fully expected to find lying dead.

The same thought was shared by those who followed the lad and climbed to the top of the wall, for directly after Blunt said hoarsely:

'Lift his head gently, Lynn. Is he dead?'

'No—not bit dead,' said the poor fellow in a plaintive voice as he slowly turned his face towards the questioner and opened his eyes. 'Only velly bad indeed. Bloken all to bit. Poo' Wing! I velly solly fo' him.'

The removal of the painful tension suffered by the lookers-on was so sudden that to a man they broke out into a loud laugh. Not a mirthful-sounding explosion of mirth, for it was painful and hysterical. Every one had expected to hear Stan answer 'Yes' to the manager's question, while the supposed-to-be-dead man's statement sounded inexpressibly droll, and his next words, in spite of a strong feeling of commiseration, only brought forth another burst that really was now one of merriment. For the poor fellow said piteously:

'Not'ing to laugh at. Wing velly, velly bad.'

'They don't mean it,' whispered Stan, whose own face was still convulsed. 'They laugh because they are so glad you are not killed.'

'Here, let me come,' cried Blunt. 'I am a bit of a doctor in my way;' and he too bent down on one knee. 'Now, Wing, my lad, cheer up. Let's see what's the matter with you.'

'Plea' don't touch, Misteh Blunt,' cried the poor fellow piteously. 'Tumble down such long way. Come all to piecee.'

'No, no; not so bad as that. Come, come; I'll be gentle with you. I want to see where you're hurt before I have you lifted up.'

'No, no; plea' don't,' sobbed the poor fellow, with the tears running down his cheeks. 'Not quite dead yet.'

'No, no; of course not.'

'Don't let the boys buly me yet a bit. Velly dleadful; makee poo' man flighten.'

'Bury you? Nonsense! Who's going to bury a live man?'

'Only half alive. Oh deah! oh deah! Oh—h—h!'

'Come, come; be a man,' said Blunt gently as he softly raised the poor fellow's head, manipulating it gently the while, and laying it down again. 'Does that hurt very much?'

'N—no,' sighed the sufferer. 'Not head bleak. All to piecee evely place, not head.'

'Then you're not going to die, I hope,' said Blunt. 'Your skull is not fractured, and the hinges of your neck are not broken.'

'You suah?'

'Quite sure, my lad. You wouldn't be talking like that if your neck was broken.'

'P'l'aps not,' sighed Wing. 'Bleak to bit evelywheh, no alm, no leg. Oh deah! oh deah!'

'Now then, I want to lay you out straight so as to feel your body all over.'

'Lay stlaight?' cried the poor fellow, with more animation. 'Leady to buly poo' Wing?'

'Nonsense!' cried Stan warmly. 'No one thinks of such a thing. Let me lay that arm close beside you.'

'No, no,' sighed the poor fellow. 'Wing don't wantee see alm come off.'

'It won't come off, my man,' said Blunt kindly.—'That's right, Lynn. Well done! It's not broken. Neither is this,' he continued as, with the patient still groaning, the other arm was tenderly examined and laid straight.—'Hurt you very much, Wing?'

'Not velly much. Bloken off. Wing can't feel.'

Stan glanced at Blunt, and saw him frown and look more stern as he met his companion's eyes to exchange a look full of intelligence.

'Now his legs,' said Blunt then. 'Both together. Lay them out straight.'

This was done, Wing groaning softly the while.

'Bones all right,' said Blunt half to himself; 'joints move easily—no dislocation. That hurt you very much, Wing?'

'N—no. Hultee evelywheh else.'

'Does that mean the spine is injured?' whispered Stan anxiously.

'I'm afraid so,' was the reply.

Wing looked sharply from one to the other.

'Young Lynn say bote leg bloke light off?'

'No,' said Blunt, smiling; 'he didn't say anything of the kind. They're quite sound. Now then, I will not hurt you much. I'm going to feel whether your ribs are broken.'

'No, no; much betteh let be. All bloke littlee bit.'

'I don't think so,' said Blunt, passing his hands

softly down the man's sides over and over again from armpits to hips. 'Now breathe, Wing.'

'Wing keep on bleathe lil bit longeh. Not dead yet.'

'"Not dead yet: see the *Quiver*,"' said Blunt softly to himself, as, incongruously enough, there came to his mind the words on one of the great bills which appeared upon nearly all the hoardings in London many years ago.

'Breathe again, Wing,' continued Blunt. 'Draw in as long a breath as you can.—Well, do you hear me?'

'Wing 'flaid,' was the reply.

'Afraid? What of?'

''Flaid nevah bleathe again; so bad.'

'Stuff! Do as I tell you.'

'Oh deah! oh deah!' sighed the poor fellow as he obeyed, and retained his breath for some time.

'Well, does that hurt you very much?'

'N—no, n—no,' sobbed the man. 'Not velly much.'

'Then there are no broken ribs, Lynn. Look here.'

As he spoke Blunt passed his hands firmly about the sufferer's chest, even going so far as to press the ribs inward, without eliciting more than a faint groan.

'There!' said Blunt; 'nothing is broken. The injury must be to the back.'

'Yes,' said Wing, uttering a whimper. 'Back. Velly, velly bad.'

'Come, let's see,' said Blunt. 'We'll have you carried into the big office now, and knock you up a bed of some kind. Give me your hand.—Take the other, Lynn, and let's raise him up into a sitting posture. Gently, mind.'

'No, no; plea', plea' don't!'

'Why not?' said Blunt, who was watching the man keenly.

'Back bloke. Come in two bit. Bleak light off. Leave poo' Wing leg lie all alone.'

'Well, well!' said Blunt gently; 'never mind; be a man. If you come right in two we'll fasten you up tightly again with sticking-plaster. You'll soon grow together again.'

'Eh?' exclaimed Wing, looking sharply from one to the other, but looking in vain, for Stan took his cue from his companion and preserved a perfectly serious countenance.

'Now,' said Blunt; 'both together. Lift.'

Wing uttered a louder groan than ever as he was drawn right up into a sitting posture and lowered down again.

'Did that hurt much?'

'Oh, velly, velly much!' said Wing, with the tears trickling down his plump face.

'Yes, you are a good deal shaken, Wing, my man, but you are not broken in half.'

'Misteh Blunt suah?'

'Yes, quite,' replied Blunt. 'You have had a wonderful escape from being killed. You are hurt, of course, but I believe that if you were helped you could stand right up.'

'Wing velly much 'flaid.'

'I suppose so, but you are going to try.'

'Must?'

'Yes, you must.—Now, Lynn, take one side; I'll take the other.—Come, Wing; just for a minute. Up with you like a man.'

Wing gave each a piteous look, but said nothing, as he was again raised into a sitting position, and then allowed his arms to be drawn over his helpers' shoulders as they bent down over him and rose together, brought him up standing, and held him there.

'Now then, you can feel that you are not broken to bits, Wing?' said Blunt.

'Yes; but hult velly bad.'

'Of course it hurt, Wing; but you'll soon get better.'

'Get betteh? No go die and be bulied?'

'You'll not die and be buried this time.—Do you see what saved him, Lynn?'

'Yes—of course. I see now. He must have come down upon those piled-up silk-bales.'

'To be sure; and they are so yielding and springy that they threw him off again so that he fell on to the stones inside.'

'Yes,' said Wing piteously; 'tumblee all togetheh. Come bump, bump on silk-bales. Flow um off again on to stones and bang back dleadful bad.'

'Yes; a very narrow escape for you,' said Blunt firmly.—'Bring a board here, some of you.'

Two of the coolies hurried off, to return in the fast-increasing gloom with a broad plank, which was set down and Wing then lifted carefully upon it, bearing the moving very well, and only uttering a groan or two.

'Now carry him into the office.—We'll make that the hospital, Lynn.'

''Top littlee! 'Top littlee!' cried Wing.

'What's the matter?' said Blunt sharply, speaking

as if he felt that he had spent enough time on his patient.

'Wing wantee say much 'blige, t'ank you. Um feel deal betteh now.'

'That 's right,' said Blunt.

'Wing velly much 'flaid when he fall. Much mo' 'flaid when come down bump, bang on stones. Misteh Blunt, young Lynn, makee feel velly happy. Not bloke all bits. Going to live long time.'

'That 's right,' said Blunt brusquely. 'But look here; all your trouble came from your going to sleep when you were on sentry.'

'Yes,' said Wing dolefully. 'Velly muchee solly. Sun hot—velly hungly—velly dly mouth. Can't help go 'sleep. Misteh velly angly poo' Chinaman?'

'Not very, Wing, for you have been severely punished.'

'Wing nevah do so no mo'e.'

'That 's right,' said Blunt, who hurried away as soon as he had seen the injured man lying comfortably; and Stan was about to follow, but Wing caught his sleeve and signed to him to bend down.

'Young Lynn know who shot Wing?' he whispered.

'Yes,' said the lad frankly.

'Young Lynn tell Wing.'

'Yes, some day,' replied the lad, who felt the blood flush to his face, but it was now so dark in the office with the blocked-up windows and the coming night that the questioner could not see.

'Young Lynn tell Wing some day. Wing betteh now. Thought bloken allee piecee. Not bloken allee piecee. Don't ca'e mandalin button now.'

'That 's right,' said Stan. 'Look, they 're bringing

you some bread and tea. Think you can eat and drink?'

'Velly much indeed,' said the Chinaman.

'Begin at once, then,' said Stan. 'Here, I must go.'

He hurried after Blunt, and as he went to where the latter was standing sweeping the dimly seen surroundings with his glass, it suddenly occurred to him that after firing the shot to startle Wing he had not replaced the empty cartridge.

He opened the breech, and at the sound of its being closed upon the cartridge Blunt turned upon him suddenly.

'Hullo, young fellow!' he cried. 'Going to fire again to startle me?'

'No,' replied Stan. 'I was thinking that I might have to shoot again, and it would not do to find that my rifle was not loaded.'

'No,' said Blunt thoughtfully. 'I'm sorry, though, that I gave you that order. For a time I was quite under the impression that you had aimed at and hit the poor fellow. But he'll soon be right again.'

'I hope so,' said Stan. 'Can you see anything with the glass?'

'Just the dim country, that's all. There! we'll set our sentries and let all who can be spared lie down for a rest till we change guard, for we must be military now. I shall take the first part of the night for visiting the posts every hour; you will have to take the second half. Mind, you will have to visit each sentinel and see that he is awake and watchful. You understand?'

'Quite,' was the reply, given in a firm voice,

though the lad could not help shrinking a little from the great responsibility about to be placed upon his shoulders.

'Come along, then.'

Stan followed, and a short time after half-a-dozen sentries were leaning upon their rifles in different places, keeping a strict watch upon the river, the direction from which danger was most likely to come; while, his part of the duties performed, the lad went to lie down on the bare boards in the office, near to where Wing was sleeping soundly. As he listened to the man's hard breathing a feeling of envy came over him. He wished that he too could sleep and forget the danger, if only for an hour. He was completely fagged with the day's exertions; the heat was great, and his brain was in a state of wild activity which made him feel that he had never been so wakeful before in his life.

All was very still without, and as he turned upon the hard boards it seemed that every one must have gone off to sleep at once, while he was growing more and more wakeful. Now and then he started up on one arm to listen to a strange cry that suggested the approach of the enemy; but after two or three repetitions he came to the conclusion that it must have come from some riverside bunting, heron, or crane, and he lay down again, but only to ask himself whether he might not just as well get up and join Blunt, to share the night-watch, for he was more sure than ever that it was impossible to sleep under such circumstances as these.

'Yes,' he said to himself, with a feeling of satisfaction, 'I'll do that;' and it seemed to him that he

got up to go and join the manager out on the dark wharf, where he could see him standing on a pile of stones close to the river-edge, leaning upon his rifle and gazing up-stream for the first sight of the enemy who might at any moment come.

Blunt turned upon him at once in the darkness, looked down, stretched out one hand and caught him by the shoulder, to say in a sharp whisper:

'Now then, my lad, time 's up!'

CHAPTER XXIII.

'AM I GOING MAD?'

TAN made no reply, but stared straight up at him, to feel the grasp upon his shoulder tighten, while Blunt said again:

'Now then, my lad, time 's up!'

But this time there was an addition —'Do you hear?'

'Yes—of course,' whispered back the lad; 'but I don't know what you mean. What time 's up?'

'Why, your time. Hang it all! You take it pretty coolly, when at any moment some hundreds of savage cut-throats may be down upon us. I couldn't have slept like that.'

'Like what?' said Stan sharply.

'In the way you have done.'

'I? I've not been asleep.'

'Oh, haven't you? Why, you're asleep now.'

'If I'd been asleep, how—— Oh, what nonsense! If I was asleep, how could I have come out here to keep you company?'

'What!' cried Blunt, with a soft, chuckling laugh. 'Well, you are a rum fellow! Do you know where you are?'

'Yes; standing out here on the wharf, with the river flowing softly down at our feet.'

'Stoop down and put your hand in it, then.'

Stan stretched out his right hand at once, and felt the rough boards, while at the same moment Wing drew one of those deep breaths which are so like snores.

The next moment Stan was sitting up feeling for his rifle.

'Here, I say, I haven't been asleep?'

'Of course not. You said you hadn't, and I can't doubt the word of a gentleman.'

'Oh, how stupid!' said Stan in a hoarse whisper, as he felt his rifle, and sprang up at once. 'What time is it?'

'Just struck two by the American clock in the big warehouse.'

'Then I have been asleep.'

'I think it's very likely,' said Blunt dryly.

'Then I must have been dreaming that I came out to you on the wharf because I couldn't sleep.'

'And instead of your coming to me, my lad, I came to you. There! come along outside in the cool air; that will wake you up thoroughly; and I want to give you a few instructions and then lie down for an hour or two to get a little rest before the enemy come in the morning.'

'Then you think they will come?'

'Most likely,' said Blunt dryly. 'Come along.'

Stan was wide enough awake now, and proved it as soon as they were out on the wharf, where a pleasantly fresh breeze came off the water.

'Did you visit all the six posts?' he said.

'Yes, every one.'

'Regularly?'

'Of course.'

'Find any one asleep?'

'No; everybody was keenly on the watch.'

'How did you know when the hours were up?'

'Guessed it,' said Blunt quickly. 'Are you wide awake enough now, my lad? You know where all the men are stationed?'

'Oh yes.'

'Repeat the places.'

Stan ran rapidly through the posts—east, west, north, south, back and front—and Blunt grunted his satisfaction.

'Good!' he said. 'The fresh men have relieved those who watched with me, and there is a new password. Don't forget it. As soon as you approach you'll be challenged with "Who goes there?"'

'Yes; I understand,' said Stan eagerly.

'No, you don't. What word will you give to prove that you are a friend?'

'Don't know.'

'Of course not. Remember it, then. "Cartridge." Understand?'

'Yes, perfectly.'

'Then I'm off. I'm dead-beat, my lad. Every hour, mind, as near as you can guess. Take hold of my whistle, and keep a sharp lookout up the river from where I did.'

'What! from up on that pile of stones at the edge of the wharf?'

'Eh?' said Blunt sharply. 'How did you know I watched from that heap of stones at the edge of the wharf?'

'I saw you there.'

'What! When did you come?'

Stan was silent, feeling quite confused.

'Did you come and look at me before you went to sleep?'

'No,' said Stan slowly—'no; I'm sure now that I did not.'

'But you said you saw me there, and I never told you nor any one else that I was going to make that my post of observation.'

'You didn't tell me,' said Stan; 'and it seems very strange. I thought I came out to you and you caught me by the shoulder.'

'You did not, and I did not catch you by the shoulder till I came and shook you to wake you up.'

'Then I must have dreamed it,' said Stan, 'for I certainly seemed to see you there in the darkness.'

'Yes, you must have dreamed it; but it seems very strange.'

'Horribly,' said Stan.

'Don't you get dreaming any more of that sort of stuff, then,' said Blunt shortly. 'Here, catch hold of this whistle; but mind, you are not to use it unless the enemy come in sight. Then blow as if you wanted to bring the place down. Pleasant watch to you. I'm off. If I don't go and lie down I shall fall down and sleep on these stones.'

'Good rest to you,' said Stan quietly. 'One moment: where are you going to lie down?'

'On the planks that formed your bed. They're nice and soft now, I suppose.'

'No; horribly hard. Put some bags under you.'

'Not I,' said Blunt gruffly. 'I could sleep now

on a row of spikes. Good-night—morning, or whatever it is.'

The manager walked quickly to the nearest opening in the wall of chests and passed through it, leaving Stan to his watch, which he commenced by giving a good searching look up river and down, and then placing his hand behind his ear to listen, before, feeling satisfied that all was right, he stepped to the bottom of the piled-up block of stones, mounted it carefully, rested the butt of his rifle at his feet, felt whether his revolver was within easy reach of his hand, and then began to think about his dream and the strangeness of his imagining that he had walked out to get to the wharf and had then seen his brother-officer, as Blunt seemed to have become now, standing exactly where he had taken his own place.

'All imagination,' he said to himself at last, for he could make nothing else of it, and forcing himself to think of something fresh, he began to peer into the darkness in every direction, and long for his first hour to pass so that he could have something more active to employ his time and go and visit the different posts.

'Let me see,' he mused; 'they will challenge me by saying, "Who goes there?" and I shall answer, "Stranger, quickly tell"—— Nonsense! "A friend." No, no; that's wrong. What did Mr Blunt tell me to say? Why, I've forgotten the word. I remember that he told me something, but it seems to have gone right out of my head. How stupid, to be sure! I couldn't have been half-awake after all.

'What shall I do?' thought Stan again, after striving vainly to recall the word. 'I must go and

ask him again, and that means waking him up. Why, he'll call me an idiot. I know; I'll go to the nearest sentry and ask him.'

The lad stopped short in his musings, for a cold chill ran through him at the thought of the risk he would have to run—the idea of the risk coming to his brain with the thought:

'Why, if I can't give the answer just when he challenges me, he'll fire and send a bullet through my head.'

The more the lad thought and strove to recall the password, the more confused his brain seemed to grow. Hundreds of words flowed through, but not one which suggested that which was correct. Time, too, was gliding steadily on, and in imagination he felt that he must be getting very near the end of the hour when his duty would lead him to the first post—for what? He felt ready to groan as he told himself that it was to be shot at.

'Whatever shall I do?' he said at last, when he stood on the stone pile fully believing that the time was past, and that if he did not visit the posts the sentries would grow uneasy and give some alarm, the result of which would be that Blunt would wake up; and how could he meet him after being guilty of such a contemptible lapse of duty?

'He'll look upon me as a complete idiot,' thought the lad; 'just, too, when I was trying so hard to behave in a manly way, and making him begin to believe in me. It's dreadful; it's horrible! Am I going mad?'

In utter despair, Stan let his rifle-barrel sink into the crook of his left arm, and turning his hands

into a binocular, gave a long, careful look up the river, half-expecting to see some tall-sailed junk dropping quietly down the stream. In his excitement he turned trees into masts, and projections from the banks and a solitary long low hut into vessels; but after further inspection he was bound to believe that there was no sign of danger, and at last, with a sigh of weariness, he sank down into a sitting position, with his legs hanging over the side of the pile and his rifle across his knees, to make one more desperate effort to recall the password from the black depths of his brain into which it seemed to have sunk down.

But all his efforts were in vain; his head seemed to grow more and more dense, and he felt that he must rouse himself and run all risks. He determined to walk towards the first sentry, and the moment he was challenged in the darkness call out loudly who he was and say frankly that he had forgotten the password.

'The sentry will think I'm half-mad, and I believe I am. It's the excitement, I suppose, and the risk and dread. I never felt anything like it before. It's dreadful. Yes, it is the excitement.'

But he did not give the true cause, for he did not grasp the position—to wit, that it was due to brain weariness from the overstrain of thought and want of proper rest. For if, when his inability was at its worst, he had been able to lie down and sleep soundly for a few hours, he would have wakened up with his mind perfectly clear and the missing word ready to come quite readily.

'There! it is of no use,' he said to himself at last; 'the time must have gone by ever so long ago. I

must get up and go. It's very risky, but I am bound to risk everything so as to do my duty. Here goes; and if I am shot at, I am shot at. It's a hundred to one that the sentry couldn't hit me in the darkness, hurry, and confusion, and before he could reload and fire again I might rush up to him and explain. Oh, horrible, to have to tell the fellow what a weak-minded muff I am!'

Grown perfectly desperate now, as he felt the minutes seem to gallop away, Stan took up his rifle, rose to his feet once more, and descended to the level of the wharf, perplexed by another thought which had come to torment him.

'He'll fire at me, of course,' he said, 'and I must run in before he can reload, as I said; but what about his revolver? Well, I can't help it,' he muttered; 'I must risk it. And perhaps I can make him understand before he can draw the pistol out of the holster.'

Drawing a deep breath, he nerved himself for the encounter, and began to walk steadily for the corner where the first sentry was stationed, and in the effort of action felt stronger and firmer.

'I may find him asleep,' he thought, 'and pounce upon him before he wakes up to challenge.

'Not likely. Our men here are not like poor Wing; but—— Ah! that's possible,' he said to himself excitedly. 'I forgot to do so; why shouldn't he have done the same? He may not have loaded, and if he has forgotten to slip in a *cartridge*—— Oh! Think of that!' he cried half-aloud, for the missing word had come.

Just in the nick of time, too, for the lad's ejacula-

tion had been heard, and in an instant the challenge came out of the darkness:

'Who goes there?'

'"Cartridge,"' said Stan promptly; and the next moment he was conversing with the first sentry, feeling as if a tremendous load had been taken off his mind.

The man had nothing whatever to report, and Stan went on towards the next.

'Mustn't let that cartridge go off again,' he said to himself, with a little laugh. 'How stupid it seems now! Cartridge—cartridge! How could I have forgotten it like that?'

There was nothing to report at either of the other posts, and Stan returned to his old station, feeling calm and refreshed, to pass the rest of the hours, which did not prove weary, though there was nothing more exciting than the occasional cry of a bird, a rustling of wings overhead, and now and then a splash in the river which suggested the possibility of part of a night spent in a boat with fishing-rod and line. He found himself wondering what Chinese river fish would be like, and whether they bore much resemblance to those of Old England—thoughts which brought up memories of days spent by pond and lake in school excursions.

But whenever the lad's ideas wandered off like this, they were brought up short again by the stern aspect of the present, and he felt ready to blame himself for letting his thoughts go astray when possibly a terrible fate might be awaiting them all, and he was bound to keep his attention fixed upon the broad stream in front.

Fortunately it was a beautiful night, and before the watcher could think it possible the stars grew faint, a long, pale, soft line of light began to appear in the east, and soon after as it broadened there was a twittering and whistling in the belt of reeds across the river where all was rural, half-woody, half-cultivated land, with waving corn and sugar-grass. Then a loud flapping and splashing began in the river, whose farther side proved to be a perfect colony of ducks; while after a time the trees, which had during the night been visible only where seen against the lighter parts of the horizon, grew plainer and plainer, till they gradually showed in their natural green. For high up orange flecks were appearing, and before long, as Stan watched, it seemed impossible that anything horrible could be on the way, so grand was the transformation taking place from night to a glorious day.

'Poor old Wing must have taken fright at nothing at all,' said Stan to himself; and with the terrors of the night seeming to have passed away like a dream, he visited his posts and chatted with the men, joining in the general anxiety whose subject was common to all—namely, how long would it be to breakfast, and would a good, hearty one be spread?

In due time the party were relieved by a couple of men who were sent up with glasses to the roof of the warehouse, after being duly cautioned not to meet with such a fate as that of poor Wing; and as soon as they were stationed Blunt made his appearance, looking eager, refreshed, and ready for anything that might come.

He greeted Stan warmly, and they went together

to see how Wing was, the injured man having been fast asleep when Blunt arose.

'Well,' said the latter, as they found him now awake, 'how are the broken pieces?'

'Allee quite wellee,' said the man, with a broad smile. 'Wing going get up to bleakfas'.'

'That's good news,' said Stan. 'Shall I help you?'

'Help? No; Wing get up all 'lone.'

He tried to rise as he spoke, smiling the while, but his whole aspect changed, his face wrinkling up like that of an old man, as he sank back groaning with pain.

'Muchee achee all oveh,' he said piteously. 'T'ink all bleaky af' all.'

'Oh no,' said Blunt, smiling. 'You're stiff and bruised, and naturally you'll feel pain as soon as you move; but do you know what you've done, sir?'

'Yes; fallee down. Almos' bleak all to piecee.'

'No, no; I mean, giving us all such a scare. Where are your Chinese pirates?'

'Allee up livah. Long way.'

'Yes; and a very long way, too. They won't come to attack us.'

'You t'inkee?' said Wing softly. 'Ah! you wait lil bit, you see. Wing see velly hollible t'ing. Pilate fight, kill. Suah come soon.'

'Why are you sure?' said Blunt quickly.

'Pilate in junk. Come flom up livah. Mus' come pas' Lynn Blothee *hong*. No othey way.'

'Unless they go back,' said Blunt. 'Well, we shall soon see. Can you eat some breakfast?'

'Wing velly 'ungly, sah. Quite empty. No eat nothing allee day yes'day.'

'Hungry—eh? That's a capital sign. Well, you lie still for a day or two, and your stiffness and pain will soon go off.'

'No wantee Wing come fightee?'

'No; we can kill all the pirates who are likely to come.'

Wing smiled very feebly, and then winced, for in making a deprecating movement with his hands he brought bruised muscles of his back into play, giving himself an agonising pain.

'That's his conscience pricking him for deceiving us about the attack, Lynn,' said Blunt dryly. 'There! let's see if this coffee is hot.—You, Wing; we'll send you something to eat. And you understand, you are to lie still. Oh, here comes some one to say breakfast's ready. I told them to set it in the long store.'

For as he was addressing Wing one of the Chinese servants hurried in to say that all was waiting.

'We must drop ceremony now, Lynn, and feed together, coolies and all. Be thankful to get anything at all under the circumstances. It isn't a scare. The enemy are on the way.'

'What! you've seen them?'

'No; but I've seen that Wing's tale is true, for not a boat has come down here with provisions this morning. Things are all wrong up-river or we should have had boats with vegetables, fruit, fish, poultry, butter, milk, and bread, while now'——

Bang!

CHAPTER XXIV.

'DUTCH COURAGE.'

IT was the report of a rifle in the clear morning air, fired from the warehouse gable occupied by the two lookout men.

'The pilates!' shouted Wing exultantly.

'It's our breakfast knocked over, Lynn,' cried Blunt. 'Come along, lad.'

He led the way out at the double, and the next minute was hailing the men on the roof.

'See them coming?' he shouted, with his hand to the side of his mouth.

'Yes, sir; half-a-dozen big junks yonder, right across the land there, in the second great bend of the river, I think.'

'Miles away, then?'

'Yes, sir; four or five.'

'Then the wind will be sometimes with them, sometimes against. That's good news, Lynn; we shall be able to have our breakfast in peace, and digest it in war. Come along in.'

'Oh, I couldn't eat now!' cried Stan excitedly, for his heart was giving big thumps as he gazed right away overland towards where the river curved round the end of a mountain-spur.

'I thought you meant to help us to beat the enemy off.'

'Of course I do,' cried Stan.

'Well, a steam-engine won't work without coal, and a human being can't fight unless you feed him. Come! no nonsense. All our preparations were made yesterday, so we've nothing to do but man our works.'

'So as to be ready?' panted Stan, whose breath came short from excitement.

'We don't want to be ready two hours too soon, and tire the men out with anxious watching before the enemy come near. We're going to have a regular good hearty meal to put strength and courage into us.'

'Dutch courage,' said Stan rather contemptuously.

'Can't be Dutch courage, because we are all English who are not Chinese. But that's a stupid old expression, my lad, meaning, of course, that the Dutch are cowardly. Now, I don't know much about history, but whenever I've read anything about the Dutch in war, it has gone to prove that the Hollanders are a thoroughly sturdy, brave, and obstinate set of men. There! don't get in a nervous state of flurry; it will spoil your shooting, and I shall want you to fire steadily and well. Why, you don't want to go into action with your veins jumping and your nerves all of a slack quiver.'

'Of course not,' said Stan huskily.

'That's right. You want every string screwed up tight and in the best of tune, so that you can play an air that will make the savage scoundrels dance a figure that is quite new to them. Eh?'

'Yes, that's what I want to do,' said Stan; 'but'——

'Never mind the butting; leave that to the pirates. Let them come and butt their heads against our wharf. Here, I'm captain of the good ship Lynn Brothers, and you're only lieutenant, so obey orders.—It's all right, gentlemen,' he continued coolly and pleasantly the next moment to the little crowd of his people who had hurried out and were waiting for their orders; 'the enemy are coming, just when it seemed as if, after all our preparations, they had got wind of what was waiting for them and had made up their minds to disappoint us.'

He was interrupted here by a loud cheer, in which the Chinese employees joined with a peculiar yell, which did not improve the heartiness of the cheer, but gave it a fierce, rasping, savage tone.

But it evidently meant business, all the same, and altogether seemed to thrill Stan from top to toe and make him feel, as he put it to himself, in better heart.

'That sounds right,' said Blunt as the cheers died out into what was a series of vocal Chinese exclamations. 'Now listen; we've got a sharp fight before us, in which we are going to show those savage scoundrels that they have made the greatest mistake they ever made in their lives.'

There was another cheer at this, one in which Stan found himself joining and waving his cap, just as if it were at home and the cheering had something to do with a football victory.

'Now,' continued Blunt, 'I reckon that we have two hours of waiting to do before the music begins

to play, so we 'll spend part of the time in enjoying the breakfast I have ordered to be ready for every one here. In the name, then, of our employers' son and nephew, I ask you to come and breakfast with him—all but you two gentlemen up yonder. You must stay and continue your lookout, but my Chinese servants will bring you up all you want.'

There was another cheer at this—one that threatened to be terribly prolonged—but Blunt held up his hand.

'That will do for the present; keep the rest of the shouts till we have driven off the enemy. Now then, pile arms and file in to breakfast. No ceremony; we must all be equal over this meal, as we shall be when we are fighting the enemy.'

'Yes, sir! Yes, sir!' came in chorus, and the men began to flock in.

'Stop a minute,' cried Stan excitedly, catching at his captain's arm.

'What is it?'

'The men on the roof want to say something.'

'Do they?—Ahoy, there! What is it?'

'Can't we have a big bamboo up here, sir?' said the clerk who had been waiting to speak.

'A big bamboo?' cried Blunt. 'Do you want to bastinado your comrade?'

'No, no, sir. One of the biggest down yonder in the yard. If you sent us up a rope, sir, we could haul the great pole up and lash it to this chimney-stack. We feel as if we ought to have a Union-jack hoisted up here.'

'Why, of course,' cried Stan excitedly.

'Yes—of course,' cried Blunt. 'I 'm glad you

mentioned it. I never thought of that. But there's plenty of time. Breakfast first, and the flag afterwards. Come along, Lynn.'

'Oh, don't—pray don't take things so coolly,' whispered Stan as they climbed in over the tea-chest wall.

'Why not? We must be cool, my lad, if we wish to win.'

'Yes; I suppose so. But hadn't we better get the flag up first, and then it will be done?'

'No,' said Blunt shortly. 'I'm not going to do anything till all our men have had a good meal. I'm not going to drive my team till every horse has had his corn, so in with you.'

'I suppose he's right,' thought Stan; 'but I couldn't take matters like that with the enemy coming slowly and surely on.'

Right or wrong, Blunt took the head of the table, and made ready for Stan to sit on his right. Directly after the rattle of knives and forks began, the Chinese servants placed great steaming mugs of coffee at every man's side, and the thick slices of bread-and-butter which kept coming in relays seemed to melt off the dishes as if they were a confection of ice, while the tall coffee-urns ran more and more dry, till there was a general falling-off in the demands for more, and the manager's stores had shrunk to the lowest ebb.

'Now then,' he cried suddenly, rising and beating the side of his coffee-mug with a spoon, 'there's plenty of time, so file off quietly; but every man will now take his place. All of you remember this, however—that Mr Lynn and I want prudence, not

rashness. When the firing begins every man is to make as much use as he can of his shelter. Some of us must be hit, but the fewer the better.'

There was a cheer at this.

'No more cheering,' cried Blunt firmly. 'This is business, not pleasure. Now, one more thing I want you all to remember. When you aim at a man and draw trigger, it is not for the sake of making a noise, but for every one to prove his marksmanship and get rid of one enemy. That is all; now in silence, please, every man to his appointed station.'

The men, Europeans and Asiatics, filed out quietly, each man taking his rifle from where he had leaned it against the wall, and Stan turned to Blunt's chief servant.

'Have you taken breakfast to Mr Wing?' he said.

The man smiled and nodded.

'Did he eat it?'

'Yes; eat and dlink muchee,' replied the man, with a broad smile, just as Blunt turned to the lad.

'I've got a flag about as big as a moderate table-cloth,' he said. 'We'll send that up to the roof by one of the stoutest Chinamen, along with a rope. Come and let us make two of the others pick out a large bamboo.'

This was all quickly done. The rope was lowered from where the two sentries and the sturdy picked Chinaman were standing by the chimney-stack, and directly after a stout twenty-foot pole was made fast, hauled up, and the flag secured to the end; and as there were no halyards attached, it was raised against

the chimney-stack and secured by the big Chinaman, the rope having been cut in half so as to lash the bamboo in two places, and wedges driven in afterwards to tighten the rope to the greatest extent.

Another cheer which arose was not checked, for it was when the light morning breeze made the folds open out to float well over the centre of the big building, even Blunt and Stan joining in the salute of the flag whose united crosses seemed to promise victory for the brave defenders of the solitary *hong*.

'That's a good job done, Lynn,' said Blunt; 'and I'm very glad it was suggested. The men will fight all the better for it. I almost feel as if I shall.'

'Yes; it seems to put courage and confidence into one,' said the lad warmly; and then he coloured a little, for it seemed to him just then, as he met his leader's eye, that Blunt was watching in a curiously inquiring way, looking, Stan thought, as if he felt a good deal of doubt as to how the lad was going to behave.

And all this time the great junks came slowly and steadily on, growing more and more distinct from the defences, but still seeming as if they were sailing right through the waving fields of growing grain.

Blunt had his glass in hand now where he stood in the little bale-made bastion, and after a good look he handed it to his companion.

'Have a good squint, my lad,' he said. 'I make it that it will be quite half-an-hour before the leading junk comes round the bend into the straight part of the river, and even then it will take another half-hour before they have run down to us.'

'Yes; I can see the matting sails very clearly

now,' said Stan after a good look, 'but the hulls are quite hidden by the fields.'

'Yes, and will be till they reach the straight reach of the river. But I expect they are all crammed with men. How many junks can you make out?'

'Six,' said Stan.

'Yes, that is what I saw. Now let us have a quiet walk round amongst the men and see if anything is needed to better the defence.'

Stan followed his leader, whose first examination was of the two doorways through which the defenders must pass when they gave up or were driven from their fragile wall.

Everything was as it should be; the doors were wide open, but ready for closing, and half-a-dozen short, stout pieces of plank were standing in sight, waiting for placing and securing inside the door after it was closed. Even the holes were made ready for the insertion of big screws instead of nails, and all was in charge of two Chinese carpenters, with assistants ready to hold the plank while it was being screwed tightly to the door-posts.

Both doors were in the same state of preparation, and Blunt nodded his satisfaction.

'Capital,' he cried.

'If the men are not scared away by a rush of the enemy,' said Stan thoughtfully.

'That we must chance,' said Blunt. 'But I do not think we shall be troubled that way, for the men who are retiring from the wall must keep the enemy in check. I propose being at the farther door: do you feel as if you could stand your ground with some of the men to hold this door till all is safe?'

'I haven't much confidence in myself,' said Stan rather excitedly, 'but I will try my best.'

'You can't do better,' replied Blunt quietly.

'You see, I am not a man,' added Stan.

'No, not in years; but you can try to act like one.'

'Yes, I'll do that,' said Stan.

'And here's a bit of encouragement for you. I shall have four of our best fellows at each of the windows over these two doors. They'll keep up such a rifle-rattle as is bound to check the Chinamen for a bit, besides which the men with you will keep on shooting till the last board is in its place.'

'And what about fire?'

'Ah! that's the weak spot, my lad,' said Blunt, with a sigh. 'They may not think of burning us out, but if they do—well, we have our supply of water and the buckets all ready. We can do no more. If they do start a blaze we must put it out. That is all that need be said: *must* put it out; and we will.'

A look round on the first floor showed everything ready for the defence that could be devised, and after inspecting this, with the open windows and breast-works ready for firing over, Blunt descended with his young lieutenant to inspect the cartridge supplies, one of the most trusted clerks being in charge of these. And then, to Stan's intense satisfaction, for he had long been all of a fret, Blunt led the way out to the wharf, where the lad started in wonder, if not in alarm, to see the progress the junks had made: for there they were, six in all, well in the strait, and sailing steadily down like gigantic, great-eyed

water-dragons making for the victims it was their mission to destroy.

For clearly enough now, as they were seen end-on by the watchers, each displayed on either bow a huge, grotesque, but cleverly painted eye, giving them the aspect of fabled monsters of the deep which had risen to the surface in search of prey, and were now leering with malicious satisfaction as they glided on.

CHAPTER XXV.

'KILL ALLEE PILATE.'

'THIS will be your station, Lynn,' said Blunt as they passed along inside the thickest wall till they reached the bale bastion, where the manager halted. 'You take that wide loophole shelter yourself at the side; there's a capital place for resting your rifle, and with such a steady support, and as you will be able to cover so wide a sweep of the enemy's advance, I shall expect you to make a good score.'

'A good score!' said Stan in a tone of voice full of disgust. 'Any one would think I was going to shoot at a target.'

'At a good many targets,' said Blunt.

'Yes, human beings. You don't really mean to say you want me to kill as many of those unfortunate wretches as I can?'

'Unfortunate? They haven't proved to be unfortunate until they are badly beaten. Yes, that is what I mean. I want you to kill or disable every one of the enemy at whom you can get a shot.'

'And do you think I could be so bloodthirsty?'

'I think you know us all pretty well here, and would be sorry to see us cut to pieces by a set

of savages who are coming down in full force to the attack.'

'Cut to pieces!' said Stan contemptuously.

'Yes,' continued Blunt sternly; 'cut to pieces—literally. I am making use of no high-flown figure of speech. I know from what I have heard and seen that these piratical Chinamen, after shooting down the people they attack, finish by spearing or beheading every fallen man; and then the braves, as they call themselves, go round with their big razor-edged swords and hack their victims to pieces.'

'Ugh!' ejaculated Stan, with a shudder of horror.

'I think you will see that it is better for you to help us to the best of your ability with your rifle and bring down as many as possible. Mercy is a fine thing, and I dare say I should be content with taking a man prisoner who dropped upon his knees and threw down his arms; but Chinese pirates neither drop upon their knees nor throw down their arms. Now look here, my lad; you are young and naturally shrink from shedding blood, but this is no time for being squeamish. You are not going to fight against ordinary human beings, but against a set of fiends who live by robbery and the murder of their victims—men, women, and innocent children.'

Stan was silent for a few moments, and in that short period his face grew so lined that he looked years older.

'Is this perfectly true, Mr Blunt?' he said at last in a husky voice that did not sound like his own.

'On my word as a man who is about to stand up and face death, and may before an hour is over be

lying on his back with his dead eyes gazing straight up beyond the clouds. You hear me?'

'Yes,' said Stan firmly.

'And you 'll do your best for the sake of those who would be ready to encourage you if they were here, for our sake, and for your own?'

'Yes, I 'm quite ready now,' replied Stan firmly.

'That 's right. Then shake hands, my lad.'

'What for?' asked Stan.

'Because,' was the reply, given in a grave, solemn tone, 'we may never have the chance again.'

'You think it is as bad as that?'

'Quite,' was the reply as hand pressed hand. 'There! we shall be at it soon, and I 'm sorry, Lynn. When you first came I thought I should always detest you as a young meddler sent here to be in my way.'

'But you don't think so now?' said Stan, smiling.

'Quite the contrary, my lad. There! we 've talked enough. Only one word or so more. Keep cool, load steadily, and fire only when you feel sure of your man. Never hurry. Recollect that one carefully taken shot is worth a score of bad ones, which mean so much waste of ammunition. There! I 'm off now to talk to the rest. I 'll come and be with you as much as I can.'

'Thank you; but I can see what you have done. You 've put me in one of the best-sheltered places, and you are going to expose yourself in the most dangerous.'

'You are only partly right, my lad. I have not put you in one of the best-sheltered places, but I am going to expose myself in one of the worst as much

as I can, and that is here—the place where I have stationed you.'

Stan's next words slipped out unconsciously:

'Why have you put me in the most risky place?'

'Because I saw that you liked shooting since you brought your gun and revolver, and I gathered so, too, from your conversation and the way in which you handled that rifle. Now are you satisfied?'

Stan nodded, and the next minute he was alone, but with men at all the loopholes near.

As soon as he was left to himself a peculiar chill came creeping over him. Blunt's words seemed to be ringing in his ears about being face to face with death, and in imagination he pictured the aspect of his newly made friend lying stark and stiff gazing up into the skies. He would have given anything in those brief minutes to have seen him come back, not to act as a shield from the firing too soon to begin, but so as to have his companionship; for, near though the others were, the little bastion seemed to be horribly lonely, and the silence about the great warehouse too oppressive to bear.

But as the boy—for he was a mere boy after all—stood at the opening with his hand grasping the barrel of the rifle whose butt rested between his feet, and gazing out at the glittering river, his image-forming thoughts became blurred; the figure of Blunt passed away, and another picture formed itself upon the retina of his eyes. There before him were the smoking ruins of a native village, and, so horribly distinct that he shuddered and turned cold again, there lay in all directions and attitudes the slaughtered victims of the pirates' attack, and all so ghastly that

the lad uttered a peculiar sibilant sound as he sharply drew in his breath between his teeth.

The next instant the chill of horror had been swept away with the imaginary picture—imaginary, but too often real in a country where the teeming population hold human life to be cheap as the dirt beneath their feet—and Stan, with his brows knit, was carefully cocking and uncocking his rifle to see if the mechanism worked accurately, before throwing open the breech to take out and replace the cartridge, when he closed it smartly and looked out at the coming junks, which glided nearer and nearer like fate.

They were so nearly within ken now that Stan could see that they were crowded with men, each a desperate and savage enemy.

'I wonder whether I can hit the first one who takes aim at me. I must or he 'll hit me,' muttered the lad. 'But I shall have to be quick or he may hit me first.'

He had hardly dwelt a moment upon this thought before he heard Blunt's voice in the long, narrow opening between the tea-chest wall and the buildings proper of house, offices, and stores, where the soft, shuffling sounds of feet could be plainly heard—sounds which Stan, who had been long enough in China to recognise them, knew to be caused by the collecting of the coolies.

Proof was afforded the next minute by Blunt's brisk voice addressing them with—

'Now, my lads, I want you to fight your best for us. How many of you can manage rifles?'

There was a few moments' silence, and then a deep voice said:

'No wantee lifle. Takee big ilon clowba', sha'p chip-chop knifee. Kill allee pilate, evely one.'

'That will do. Wait, then, till the wretches rush in, and then use the bars and your knives. I see you mean to fight.'

There was further shuffling of soft feet, and though he could see nothing, Stan knew that the big picked Chinamen, whose muscles were hardened by their tasks of handling and running to and fro over gangways with heavy bales, casks, and chests, were being posted in places of vantage ready to receive the enemy when they landed at the wharf and made their first onslaught.

Stan turned to watch the junks, whose sails were now lowered as unnecessary and stowed lengthwise to be out of the way, while great sweeps had been passed out, not to urge on the vessels, but to keep a little way on and make them answer the steering-gear, the force of the current being enough for the enemy's purpose, which was to lay them alongside the wharf after—as was proved ere long—a sharp discharge from their clumsy artillery.

'How long they seem in coming!' thought Stan, though in reality the time was very short; and then he started, for Blunt had come close up behind him unperceived.

'Here I am,' he said. 'We are all ready, and our people are waiting for you to open the ball.'

'For me?' cried Stan, who felt startled.

'You. You will fire the first shot when I give the word. That will be the signal that I consider the enemy sufficiently close, and the men will begin picking the wretches off. I say, look; clumsy as the

great craft seem, they come on very steadily and well. There is no confusion. See what a line they keep of about a couple of hundred yards apart. Their captains are not bad sailors after all.'

'Yes, they come on slowly and surely,' said Stan in a sombre tone.—'I wish I didn't feel so nervous.'

'It's quite natural,' said Blunt. 'I feel just as bad as you.'

'You do?' cried Stan, staring. 'Nonsense!'

'Indeed I do,' said Blunt. 'I'm in what schoolboys call a regular stew. Every one in the place feels the same, I'll venture to say. It's really quite natural; but as soon as the game begins'——

'Game!' cried Stan bitterly.

'Oh, very well; drama, if you like. I say as soon as it begins we shall all be too busy to feel fear, and be working away like Britons. Here, it's going to begin sooner than I expected. By your leave, as the porters say, I want a look through my glass. Yes,' he continued as he carefully scanned the leading junk, 'they've got a big brass swivel-gun there, and they're loading it. How's your rifle sighted now?'

'For two hundred yards.'

'That will do nicely. You shall have a shot soon. But they're going to let us have it. Keep well in cover. I hope the lads are all doing the same.'

'Yes, they're going to begin,' said Stan excitedly.

'Bravo, good eyes! How do you know?'

'Because I can see a man going along the deck with something smoking.'

'That's right. Yes: I can see it. It's the linstock or slow-match. Keep under cover, for we shall have a hail of ragged bullets of all kinds directly. They've

laid the gun, and the man is waiting to apply the match.'

'Yes: I can see that too. Look out: here it comes. I saw the smoke seem to make a dart downwards.'

'Quite right; and I can see with the glass that the burning end is resting on the touch-hole.'

'But it doesn't go off,' said Stan excitedly.

'No; the priming must have heen knocked off, or be damp or badly made. It's a failure, certainly. There! I wish you could see with the glass; it's all as clear as if it was close to us. One of the men close to the breech of the long piece is priming it again.'

'I can't see that—only that the men are busy,' said Stan as the great leading junk, with its leering eyes, glided onward till it was somewhere about a hundred and fifty yards from the wharf and being swept closer inshore. 'Now then,' cried Stan; 'look out!'

For he could just distinguish the downward movement of the smoking match, which was followed directly after by a couple of puffs of smoke, one small from the breech, the other large and spreading, followed by a bellowing roar, almost following a strange rattling and crash as of stones about the face and surface of the wharf. There was a dull pattering, too, over the head of the watchers, and dust and scraps of stones ran down the front of the building.

Stan made some remark, but it was drowned by a deafening roar—nothing to do with barbaric artillery, but coming from the throats of hundreds of men, beginning with those in the first junk, right along

from those which followed, to the very last; and to make the sounds more ear-stunning, men began belabouring gongs in every junk with all their muscle brought to bear.

'Nice row that, Lynn,' said the manager coolly. 'Just shows what fools these barbarians are. Of course, you know why they beat these gongs?'

'To frighten us, I suppose,' said Stan.

'That's it; and I don't feel a bit alarmed. Do you?'

'Pooh! No; but I did feel scared when the charge of that big swivel-gun came rattling about us.'

'Yes, and with reason, too,' said Blunt quietly. 'Their ragged bits of lead and scraps of iron make horribly painful wounds. I don't want to get a touch of that sort of thing.'

The moment the booming of the gongs ceased, Blunt drew back and shouted to know if any one had been hurt by the discharge of the great swivel; but though he waited and called again, he had good proof in the silence that no one was injured.

'Do you hear there?' he cried again. 'Is any one'——

His words were drowned by a roar from the enemy's gun, almost accompanied by the snarl-like noise made by its great charge, which came hurtling against the chests and bales this time, though a good half spattered angrily over the front of the stones.

'We mustn't let them have it all their own way, Lynn, my lad, or they'll come on with a rush full of confidence and do too much mischief. Now then, the distance is easy. Look yonder in the front of the junk: what can you see?'

'Two men pulling out the rammer of the long swivel-gun, and another pointing it, as it seems to me, exactly at this loophole.'

'I don't believe he is, my lad, but it looks like it.'

'Now he 's taking the—linstock—don't you call it? —from the man who is holding it, and is going to fire.'

'Don't let him,' said Blunt sharply. 'Take aim. Ready? Fire!'

In obedience to his companion's orders, Stan had dropped on one knee, taken a long and careful aim, and then drew trigger.

For a few moments the soft gray smoke hung before the lad's eyes and hid what was going on; but he did not waste time. Throwing out the empty cartridge, he began to fit in another, and as with trembling fingers he reclosed the breech he whispered sharply:

'Did I hit?'

'I fancy so; the man sprang up in the air and fell backwards. You 've no time to look, so take it from me. They are carrying the man away.'

Stan drew in his breath with a hissing sound, but no time was given him to think of what he had done, for Blunt's voice made him start, as he was bending over him.

'Loaded?' he said.

'Yes.'

'Take aim, then, at that man with the match. He is shifting the gun a little to allow for the distance the junk has floated with the stream.'

'Yes; I see.'

'Let him have it, then. Sharp! He must not fire that piece.'

Stan's rifle rang out, and the Chinaman dropped behind the high bulwark and was seen no more.

'Load again, stupid!' cried Blunt, for Stan half-knelt behind the opening from which he had aimed, looking stunned and motionless, impressed as he was by his terrible success. But he started into active life again under the spur of his companion's fierce words.

'Keep on firing slowly and steadily, Lynn,' said Blunt in tones which made the lad feel that he must obey, though the compunction was dying and he knew how necessary it was to render the big piece useless by checking the efforts of the gunners.

He fired again just in the nick of time, and the man who now held the linstock dropped it and stood gesticulating to his companions.

'You've missed him, Lynn,' said Blunt angrily. 'Look! he has picked it up again.'

Stan needed no telling that he had only startled the gunner by sending a bullet close to his head, and before he could fire again a puff of smoke darted from the mouth of the piece, and Blunt struck him sharply across the back, spoiling his aim so that the bullet from his rifle went anywhere.

'Why did you do that?' he cried sharply, for the blow stirred him into making an angry retort, as he gazed through the smoke at his comrade. 'I've done the best I could. I'm not used to this sort of—— Why—what—Mr Blunt!' he cried, as he saw a peculiar look in the manager's face, and that he was leaning sideways against the wall of bales. 'Oh! you're hurt!'

The manager tightened his lips and nodded

sharply before letting himself subside, gliding down half-resting against the defensive building, and saving himself from falling headlong in his faintness.

'Here,' cried Stan, letting his rifle rest on the top of the bale from which he had fired, 'let me bind up the wound. Where are you hurt?'

'Hah!' exclaimed Blunt, as if mastering a spasm of pain. 'Never mind me. Go on firing, my lad. Don't you see how close they are in? Fire away, and shout to the others to keep it up. Stop them from loading if you can; it may scare the next junk from coming on.—Ah, that's better!'

For the sounds he heard were pleasant to his ears. There was no need for Stan to shout, and he took up his rifle again in obedience to his orders and went on aiming at the men on the junk who seemed to be most prominent. Firing was going on all around, and from the upper windows of the warehouse as well, the consequence being that the men at the sweeps fell one by one; and then the two men handling the huge steering-oar dropped away, with the result that, instead of the great junk being laid alongside of the wharf for the pirates crowding her to leap ashore, they were carried on down-stream, with her captain and officers raging frantically, till the chief man received a bullet through one of his upraised arms and sank back into the arms of a subordinate.

CHAPTER XXVI.

'FIRE AWAY!'

THE leading junk was soon some distance down the river, the confusion on board from the steady rifle-fire, which caused man after man to drop, checking all efforts to recover the lost ground; but the second junk had taken its place, and those on board were pouring in a hot fire from two clumsy swivel-guns, consisting of showers of rough missiles, bullets, broken iron, and the like.

But little damage was done to the sheltered defenders, who, animated by the example set from the little bastion, kept up a steady, regular fire, with certainly more than half the shots telling among the Chinamen working the guns or giving orders.

In the intervals of his firing, however, Stan kept on imploring Blunt to let him summon help, or cease firing and attend to the injury.

'Go on firing, as I told you,' cried the wounded man in an angry snarl. 'Can't you see that you are helping me by what you are doing.'

'But you must be getting faint.'

'I am,' said Blunt fiercely, 'with the hard work to keep you at work. Do you think I want our men to be put out of heart because I am bowled over?'

'No,' said Stan, with his cheek against his rifle-stock, and he pulled the trigger, sending a leaden messenger at one of the enemy who was about to lower his smoking linstock, which produced a savage yell by its effect; for the man with the burning match flung up his hands, the linstock went flying overboard, and Stan's frown deepened as he felt that he had desperately wounded the gunner, who was being borne away before the lad's rifle was again charged.

'That was another hit, wasn't it?' said Blunt anxiously.

'I think so,' was the reply, 'but I'm not sure that it was my shot.'

'Never mind so long as it's one murderer the less. Keep on firing, my lad, while you can get so good a chance. I can't see what the rest are doing. It seems to me that they are only wasting powder.'

'Oh no,' said Stan; 'men on the junk keep on falling. But there are two more junks coming close up.'

'And you haven't checked them. Fire away! Try and hit the steersmen.'

'It's hard work to see them so as to pick them out,' said Stan, 'but I'll do my best.'

The lad's best was to aim carefully at the men holding the steering-oars of the second and fourth junks, but excitement combined with the distance affected the steadiness of his aim, and he uttered an impatient ejaculation as he saw the two great crowded vessels coming steadily onward.

'We shall be having all three close in together,' he muttered. 'It's impossible to keep them off.'

But better fortune had attended his efforts than he had given himself credit for. In each case his carefully aimed shot had taken effect, and they were supplemented by the shattering fire kept up by the defenders at the other loopholes. Certainly the third and fourth junks were coming in fast, but it was in an ungoverned way, and their action soon after produced a savagely furious volley from the captain of the second junk; for its companions came on to crash into it, with the accompaniment of falling masts and sails, and the confusion of top-hamper, a good deal of which came down upon the men, who yelled shrilly and angrily until they were extricated or able to get free.

In spite of the faintness and sinking caused by his wound, Blunt held tightly on by the cord binding the bale against which he had propped himself, and watched everything that took place with swimming eyes, but an intense feeling of satisfaction as he witnessed the disasters of the attacking pirates. And every now and again when the noise grew less overpowering he hurriedly went on giving his companion instructions to take careful aim at this one and that of the enemy's force, and did not fail to give praise when the shot was successful.

'Bravo! Well done, lieutenant!' he said hoarsely. 'That's a murderer the more put out of action. Don't shudder; three parts of them will unfortunately get better, but they're done for this time.' Then: 'Keep it up, my lad. You take my place now and lead the fighting. Nobody knows yet that I'm down. You'll have to give the order soon to withdraw into the warehouse.'

'Not fight it out here?' cried Stan eagerly, for he was fast growing intoxicated with the wild excitement of the fray, and had forgotten all about the danger of his position.

'No; it is impossible. You are only hindering them now and crippling them as much as is possible, but before long they will come like a wave over the sides of the junks, and swarm up to the defence here, and you will not be able to resist them.'

'But we should all have a much better chance to shoot them down then.'

'Of course; and a dozen or two would be struggling on the stones. But if a hundred were shot down it would make no difference; they would come on all the same in their blind, savage fury, for they think nothing of those who fall. Here, leave your rifle where it is for a few moments. That's right. Now take this whistle. Put it in your vest-pocket, where you can get at it easily, and after they have made their first rush, use it.'

'Yes,' said Stan huskily as he thrust the little instrument into his watch-pocket; 'but about you? Hadn't I better call a couple of the coolies to come and lift you into your room?'

'No!' snapped out Blunt, as if he were maddened by the pain he suffered. 'Do you want to turn a brave resistance into a panic?'

'No; of course not, but'——

'Silence!' cried the poor fellow sternly. 'The men are fighting splendidly now, and I want them to go on till such time as it is necessary to get inside and continue the defence from the upper windows. Do you hear?'

'Yes; and I'll do all you wish, but I must have time to get you safe inside.'

'Leave that to me,' said Blunt slowly and in a more gentle tone. And then, as if warned by his sensations, he continued: 'If I faint, use your own common-sense. Don't hesitate: fight till it seems folly to hold on longer here; then blow the whistle with all your might. Some of them are sure to rush to your help. Then let a couple take me by the hands and drag me—don't let them stop to carry me—drag me in through the first doorway.'

'I'll take one hand myself.'

'You'll do nothing of the kind,' cried Blunt passionately. 'I order you to take my place as captain, and as your father's son save us all from this murderous scum. You're captain now—do you hear?'

Stan nodded.

'Then act sensibly. Do you want to give up directing and turn yourself into a coolie to save one helpless man, and perhaps sacrifice your own life?'

'But you are'——

'Only one,' snapped the manager; 'and the most useless one here. Now back to your place, and go on firing as the captain should, to bring down more of the miscreants and encourage our brave fellows. If you fail now I'm not able to strike, the rest will be out of heart at once.'

'You are giving me more than I can do,' half-groaned Stan. 'I'm only a boy.'

'Forget that, Stan,' said his wounded comrade harshly. 'I say you're acting like a man. Now

fire at that giant of a fellow standing in the gangway waving his great broad-bladed sword.'

There was the sharp crack of Stan's rifle, and the big, showily dressed Chinaman followed the direction in which he waved the sword—that is, shoreward—and literally dived off the junk into the river, to be seen no more by those in the bastion.

'Well done—for a boy!' cried Blunt mockingly as he passed his left hand over his streaming brow. 'I only hope every man at the back and right and left is doing as well. Mind when you retreat that the doors are well barricaded.—Reloaded?'

'Yes,' cried Stan, who felt as if his companion's words were goading him to act in a way contrary to his nature, and without further urging he fired again and again.

'Good—good!' panted Blunt. 'I daren't turn to look back, because I should expose myself—and I know that if I stirred I should faint—but tell me, how are the fellows behaving?'

'Keeping up a steady fire, just as you told them. I can see the poor wretches falling killed or wounded. There goes another into the river.'

'Hah!' sighed Blunt. 'I can't tell the difference between their firing and ours. It seemed, though, as if our fire was dropping off.'

'It isn't that,' said Stan, passing his reloaded rifle into his left hand so as in turn to wipe his streaming face with his right, quite unconscious of the fact that he had covered it with the wet, black, exploded powder fresh from the breech of his piece and his used cartridges, and now leaving a broad black smudge across his forehead and down each cheek—

'it isn't that. I'm sure our men are firing splendidly, but the enemy are using their clumsy pieces now from the junks.'

'Yes, that's it,' said Blunt slowly. 'But what are they doing now? I can't see for this cloud of smoke.'

'Getting the junks closer in with poles. They're going to leap ashore, I think, and make a rush.—But there is no cloud,' he muttered to himself; 'the wind is driving it away.'

'Be ready, then,' said Blunt. 'Fire once more right into the thick of them, reload—and—then be ready—to sound retreat—to—sound'——

Stan took a quick aim, fired, threw open the breech of his piece with his fingers trembling, and then closed it again, using stern resolution to carry out his orders, though all the time he felt sure that Blunt was as he found him when he looked round—that is to say, lying motionless on the floor of the bastion, but with his fingers still crooked in the cord of the bale.

'It must be nearly time,' groaned Stan to himself, as he felt half-stunned for the moment.

But a moment only. The next he was grinding his teeth as he again passed his rifle into his left hand to feel for his knife with the right, take it out, and open the blade.

For he foresaw a terrible difficulty as he glanced first at Blunt's hand still clinging to the cord, and in dread lest the desperate clutch might prove a hindrance, he bent down and, as quickly as he could, sawed through the tightly strained cord, which quivered and then, as the last strand was severed, sprang apart with a sharp crack, springing out of

the wounded man's fingers and leaving the arm free to fall across his breast.

Stan sighed as he replaced the knife and turned to fire once more; but he saw at once that if the retreat was to be made and a fatal hand-to-hand conflict, which could only terminate in their all being borne down, avoided, the signal must be given at once.

The time had come. In fact, as he placed the whistle to his lips he felt that the call had been deferred too long, for there was a furious yelling, accompanied by a deafening beating of gongs, and with a roar a human torrent came pouring out of the gangways and off the sides of the two nearest junks; while the crews of two more, which were interlocked with their companions, rushed on to the nearer decks to cross and supplement the attack.

'They'll never hear it!' thought Stan as he blew with all his might, just as every holder of a rifle was making it spit its deadly cones of lead right into the thick of the enemy's advance.

But he was wrong. At the first shrill chirrup of the silver whistle, its keen, strident tones cut through the heavy roar of the gongs and voices, and as the firing from the junks had ceased so as to allow the enemy to advance, so did that of the defence; and while Stan was drawing breath to repeat the piercing call, there was the quick sound of footsteps, and two of the clerks appeared at the back.

'Dead?' shouted one as he saw Blunt lying motionless.

'No,' shouted Stan. 'Quick! A hand each, and drag him in. Off!'

A score of savages, armed with swords and spears, appeared above the frail defence.

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The last words acted like an electric shock, and in less time than it takes to tell it the manager's hands were seized, and with his head just clear of the ground, the two bearers doubled with him along the back of the tea-chest wall and in through the open doorway.

Stan followed them till he too reached the opening, and then stood back against the chests waiting while man after man dashed up to this and the farther door, till the last had passed in, and then with unconscious bravery the lad followed.

It was none too soon, for as he reached the lintel the hands of a score of savages, armed with swords and spears, appeared above the frail defence, assisted to the top by their fellows. Directly after they began to tumble over, heedless of the firing now being opened upon them again from the upper windows of the warehouse; and then, wild with fury as several dropped, they made a dash at the doorway into which some of them had seen Stan dive.

CHAPTER XXVII.

'THE DANGEROUS TASK.'

IT was none too soon, but soon enough, for as Stan rushed through, still blowing the whistle—for no reason at all save that he had forgotten to take it from his lips—the plan enforced by Blunt in his instructions acted like clockwork and the door was clapped to in the faces of the enemy with a sharp bang; half-a-dozen of the defenders stood fast with rifles presented ready to fire past the carpenters if there were need, and a doubt was rising in the breathless lad's breast. It was this:

'Oh, if the others don't secure that farther door!'

The doubt was quelled by a second sharp bang, and a cheery voice—that of another doubter—cried:

'It 's all right there.'

'Yes,' cried Stan as he thrust the whistle back into his pocket. 'Splendidly done!'

There was no further talking, for the noise outside was deafening. The enemy, maddened at their check, were hard at work chopping frantically at the door with their heavy swords, and stabbing at the panelling with spears in a way which threatened to make short work of it. But all the time the right work was going on, the two great Chinese carpenters placing

the prepared short lengths of timber in their places as coolly as if nothing was the matter, and screwing them tightly with wonderful celerity, till the highest piece was being adjusted, when Stan pushed quickly past the men waiting to fire if the need arose, and made his way to the farther door, to find, to his great delight, that the barricading was even further advanced than at the one he had left.

'Well done!' he shouted, to make his voice heard above the horrible din without. 'Now one man will be enough to stay on guard here ready to raise the alarm if the enemy begin to get through; the rest off at once to man the windows. Mind, don't waste a cartridge.'

Stan actually blushed in the semi-darkness as he gave the order in an imperative voice, and then felt ashamed of himself for daring to order these men. But a strange feeling of exultation ran through him the next moment, and he felt the pride of power, for there was a hearty cheer, and his command was obeyed with such alacrity that he ran back, and found the little party he had left waiting still as if for a similar order.

This was given loudly and quite as a matter of course, and from that moment Stan felt as if he really was in command, ready to do his best to protect the place, and as if he had only to speak to find the defenders ready to fight for him to the death.

It is a strange thing, that natural readiness of the human being to follow the lead of the one who leaps to the front and displays his contempt of danger, and it has often done work that history is proud to record.

'What next?' thought Stan as the last man dashed off, rifle in hand, to augment the dropping fire from the carefully protected windows.

The answer came from his heart quite silently: it was to go and see how Blunt had fared, and where he had been placed. But the intent was crushed out by the orders that had been given him—by Blunt's own words about his only being *one*, and that Stan was not to do anything to sacrifice many lives for the sake of looking after one wounded.

His place, he knew the next moment, was to be on the upper floor, watching and directing, ready to send men here and there where the danger was most pressing, and above all to be on the watch for the great peril; and to this end he made his way to where the great water-casks stood ready filled, wishing to make sure that if the emergency arrived the coolies were at their posts ready to run here or there with buckets of water.

To his great delight, there they all were, every man stripped to the waist and with a great ready-bared knife stuck through his girdle, ready to salute him with a broad smile and seize a bucket to plunge into the open-ended casks.

'No, no—not yet!' cried Stan authoritatively. 'Be ready.'

A grunting murmur of satisfaction followed him as he hurried back towards the broad stairs, at the foot of which the big carpenters and their two assistants stood, knife-armed like the rest, and having a great moving crowbar resting with one end upon the floor.

Stan was about to spring up the stairs with the

intention of sending one of the clerks to the office to report upon his chief's state, when he heard a shrill cry, and turning sharply, he became aware that Wing, in spite of his injuries, was up and dressed, and limping painfully in his efforts to overtake him.

'Ah, Wing!' he cried. 'Up? You ought to be lying down out of danger.'

'Wing not lil bit 'flaid,' said the man quickly. 'Wing look see if young Lynn allee light, quite well, casee you wantee know allee 'bout Misteh Blunt.'

'Yes, yes; I was going to send. I can't come yet,' cried Stan eagerly.

'Wing t'ink muchee jus' come tell young Lynn Misteh Blunt lie on back. Tablee. Close Wing. Wing see what matteh.'

'Yes, yes. Is he very bad?' cried Stan.

'Dleadful bad,' said the man solemnly. 'Gottee big hole light floo heah.'

The position he denominated 'heah' was pointed out by the Chinaman with his two thumbs, one placed on his shoulder-blade, the other on the upper part of his right chest.

'Oh! that must be dangerous,' cried Stan wildly.

'Yes, velly bad,' said Wing, frowning and shaking his head. 'Wing findee bullet lead inside py-yama.'

'And you have tried to bind it up?'

Wing nodded importantly.

'Bad place,' he said. 'Wind come out flont, blood lun out behind.'

'There must be a big bandage put over the place. Go and tear up a sheet.'

'No,' said Wing, still more importantly. 'Gettee clean tablee-cloff—cuttee long piecee.'

'You have done that?'

'Yes,' said Wing, rather pompously now, as if exceedingly proud of his knowledge. 'Wing know allee 'bout it. Mend bloken leg oncee. Big tub fallee flom clane when wind um up. Fall on coolie leg. Poo' Chinaman. Wing mend leg. Misteh Blunt got hole floo heah'—the thumbs illustrating again—'Wing get softee cotton, pushee piecee in flont hole, 'top wind come out; pokee piecee in back, keepee blood in. Allee blood lun out, Masteh Blunt die velly fast.'

'But have you bandaged the place well?'

'Bandage? Yes; tie velly long piece tablee-cloff lound and lound and oveh shouldeh. 'Top wind, 'top blood. Get well now.'

'Go and stop with him, Wing,' cried Stan excitedly. 'I can't come.'

'Wing know. Got tellee men how to fight.'

'Yes. Stop with Mr Blunt. You're a splendid fellow, Wing,' cried Stan excitedly.

'Young Lynn glad Wing 'top place?'

'Yes, I tell you. Capital! Off with you back.'

'Yes, Wing go back. T'ink young Lynn like know.'

Stan only heard a part of this, for the firing was going on furiously, the enemy were battering at the doors, and just then there was a crash and a heavy report.

'They've begun to use the guns again,' panted the lad as he sprang up the broad warehouse stairs two at a time, to see half-way down the great store one of the windows wrecked as to its defences, bales and boards lying some feet in, the former tumbled

over and the latter in splinters, while the two defenders who had been stationed there lay upon the floor.

'They've got one of the biggest guns to bear on the window,' said one of the defenders of the next window excitedly.

Stan nodded and ran to the weakened place, to go down on one knee and look out.

He was not cautious enough, for he was seen from the deck of one of the junks and saluted by a yell, followed directly after by the discharge of some half-dozen *jingals*, whose ill-directed bullets whistled by his ears.

'Take care!' shouted three or four voices.

'I should think I will,' muttered Stan, dropping on his face, his rifle striking the floor with a bang. Then quickly drawing back, he got behind one of the bales that had been driven in, rested his rifle upon it, and raising his head cautiously, prepared to fire.

For at his first look out he had seen all he wanted, and following almost directly upon the sharp clicking of his rifle-lock, the man nearest to him heard the lad draw a deep breath and fire.

Stan's fresh companion peered from his side to see the object of the lad's shot, and he uttered a loud 'Bravo!' for Stan had continued his former luck, as, seeing that the gun on board the biggest junk was being reloaded, and that the firing-match was just about to be applied, he steadied himself, took the long breath the young clerk had heard, and then drew trigger, with the result that there was no heavy report and crash of another of the defences.

Another attempt was made to fire the gun, but a second man went down. A third fared no better, and amidst cheers from the different windows, joined in by the two injured men, who were stunned by the woodwork driven in upon them but not seriously hurt, one of the officers of the junk was to be seen raging about giving orders, which produced a ragged volley from the clumsy Chinese firelocks, bullets and pieces of iron hurtling through the window; but no more harm was done, except to the officer, who fell pierced by a shot from farther along the great goods floor.

While the party who had landed, quite seventy strong, were raging and tearing round the building, battering at door and barricaded window, and every now and then making a vain thrust with their spears at the firing party quite beyond their reach at the upper windows, and frequently getting a bullet in return which laid a desperate aggressor low, some of the more cautious sheltered themselves on the outside of the wall of bales and chests to begin firing up at the defenders. But with no advantage to themselves, for while crouching down behind the wall they could only bring their heavy, clumsy matchlocks to bear at such an angle that the charge went up high above the defenders' heads. And whenever a man who had grown furious from several disappointments rose up to get a better aim, he went down to a certainty, riddled by a bullet sent home by one or other of the watchful clerks.

And all the while effort after effort was made by the leaders of the pirates to bring the swivel-guns of their junks to bear, but without avail; for, with

a strong desire to emulate the success of Stan's shots, quite half-a-dozen of the clerks and warehousemen who commanded the dangerous spots waited patiently and watchfully with presented piece and finger on trigger for the opportunities that were not long in coming. Man after man of those working the guns was shot down, till, in spite of yells and blows from their leaders, not a single pirate could be induced to carry out the dangerous task of loading, laying, or firing the heavy swivel-guns.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

'FIERY MISSILES.'

THE desperate fight had been going on for quite an hour from the time of the landing of the attacking party, and the men who had gained an entrance into the first defence had grown exhausted by the vain efforts they had made to break a way through, and contented themselves, such as could, with getting back outside to the shelter of the walls and, crouched there, watching their companions' fire, while turning a deaf ear, and then sullen looks, towards their leaders on the junks, who kept on furiously yelling to them to go on.

They did not seem inclined to risk it, but scowled at those who ordered the attack, and waited. After a short consultation among the junk captains—a consultation carried on by shouts and yells from vessel to vessel, delivered through hands held trumpet fashion to the lips—it became evident to Stan and his little garrison that an attack was to be made upon a larger scale. For the crews of the junks manned the sweeps, and while those close in strove to lay their craft alongside the wharf above and below the spot where their three junks were grappled together, the other two began to creep up inshore

as if to land their men where they could get right round to the back of the great *hong* and the outbuildings; while, to add to the peril, one of the men on the far side of the roof-ridge—a point of vantage from which several successful shots had been sent into the vessels—shouted the bad news that the first junk, which had been carried down the river till she had disappeared round a bend, was coming up again full sail, evidently to rejoin the others.

'It looks very bad now, Mr Lynn,' said Lawrence, the foreman, who had distinguished himself by the way in which he had maintained his coolness. 'They're going to make a grand attack now in force.'

'Yes,' replied Stan quietly, 'it does look very bad. They're too many for us.'

'But you won't give in?' cried another anxiously.

Before Stan could reply another broke out with:

'They don't want to kill us; only to plunder the *hong*. Why not take advantage of this lull and quietly get out on the other side, so as to get right away from the river? I don't believe that they would pursue us.'

'Then you have a great deal more faith in the Chinese character than I have,' said the first speaker. 'I believe that as soon as they saw our confession of weakness'——

'We should make no confession of weakness,' retorted another. 'We should only retire.'

'They would think we were beaten, and come after us for certain,' said another bitterly.

'Yes,' said the first speaker sharply, 'and follow us till we were surrounded and overwhelmed out yonder in the marsh or paddy-fields.'

'But why should they take all that trouble for nothing?'

'For nothing? They wouldn't call it for nothing when they would get all our rifles and ammunition, in addition to having the profound satisfaction of spearing and hacking to pieces a party of what they call foreign devils. What do you say, Mr Lynn?'

'Only this,' said Stan quietly, 'that if we are to be killed it would be better to fall fighting to the last in our own defence.'

'Then you will fight?' cried Laurence eagerly.

'Of course,' was the reply. 'I am obeying Mr Blunt's instructions to defend the place to the last.'

'But isn't this the last, sir?' said the clerk who had proposed the retreat.

'Oh no. We are as safe or safer than ever, and though there are going to be a great many more to make the attack, it does not follow that any of them will get in.'

'Hear, hear!' shouted Laurence.

'And besides,' continued Stan, 'when it does come to their beginning to break in, we have all our big, strong coolies to join us and help with their knives and bars. I feel sure that they will fight bravely.'

'So do I, Mr Lynn,' said Laurence warmly.

'But they are brother natives,' said the objector.

'That's the very reason why they will fight all the fiercer for us. They hate pirates like poison, and will enjoy sending them out of the world far more than we shall. It is only fair, though, Mr Lynn, that you should give any one who likes to make the attempt to escape free leave to go.'

'Yes,' said Stan; 'it is not fair to force any one to fight who wishes to escape.'

To Stan's surprise, there was a dead silence; and after waiting a few moments listening to the storm of voices without, Stan continued:

'Then we're all going to stand by one another?'

'Yes, to a man, sir,' said the objector. 'I dare say I'm wrong in my ideas, and I give way.'

There was a cheer at this. Every man went back to his shelter and examined his rifle, afterwards taking out and examining his revolver before thrusting it back in its holster, while Stan went from man to man to inspect his supply of cartridges, and ended by having a fresh box up and himself seeing to the refilling of every bandolier.

While this was in progress those who kept a strict watch found that no further attack was being made. The matchlock firing had ceased, and the men beneath the outer defence lay crouched close as if waiting for further orders.

But the preparations on board the junks were being made with a determination that augured a serious encounter at the next attack. Men were collecting, armed with spears and the great heavy curved Chinese swords which widened out in the blade from about an inch and a half at the handle to more than double that width near the point; while something fresh suddenly took Stan's attention, and he pointed it out to those with him in the great store.

'Yes, sir,' said his chief backer in the late debate; 'that's the ugliest thing we've seen yet.'

'Why, it looks like the preparation for a procession. Every hatch on the different junks has

seven or eight great Chinese lanterns; but they're not yet lit, so far as I can tell in this bright sunshine.'

'They mean it for a procession,' said Laurence 'and they think it is for our funeral.'

'What!' cried Stan. 'But look; what's that smoke?'

'They're lighting stink-pots to throw, sir. Those and the lanterns are to burn us out.'

'Think so?'

'I feel sure,' was the reply.

'But why didn't they use the stink-pots before?'

'Because they thought they could drive us out without. They didn't want to set fire to the place for fear of damaging the loot they mean to take. They can find a market fast enough for tea and silk; but they're getting savage now, and mean to make an end of us, even if they have to burn the place down.'

'Well,' said Stan coolly, 'we must not let them. I'll go down now and fetch up the warehousemen and coolies to do nothing else but pick up and hurl back the fire-pots, for of course they will try and fling them in at these open windows.'

'You couldn't do a better thing, sir.'

'No,' said Stan thoughtfully. Then raising his voice, he cried: 'If any one here can suggest anything more to be done, pray speak out.'

'Nothing more could be done, sir,' said a clerk. 'Your arrangements are excellent.'

'Mr Blunt's are, you mean,' said Stan, smiling. 'Very well, then; I want to stay up here and watch. You, Mr Laurence, go down and bring up the coolies,

and tell them what they are wanted to do; but you had better leave half below to be ready to help with the water-buckets.'

The messenger went down, and returned with the sturdy body of Chinese labourers, who were placed at intervals from end to end of the great open space, well back in shelter; and as soon as this disposition of the defensive force had been carried out, and the young chief had satisfied himself that the men thoroughly grasped the duties they had to perform, Stan gave orders for all who handled rifles to be in readiness to take good aim and mark out for punishment every prominent leader amongst the enemy, so as to try and bring him down, and thus throw confusion amongst the men who were being led to the next attack.

Then began a weary wait, evidently caused by the leaders of the expedition holding their men in hand until the first junk had beaten up against the wind till she was some distance beyond the *hong*, when the watchers saw the sails suddenly begin to glide down and the great junk slacken and stop in its upward course; while directly after, with the sweeps on either side thrust out, she began, after hanging upon the current for a few moments, to drop down again, the huge oars being plied vigorously, so as to run her ashore just below the edge of the wharf.

'Now,' cried Stan suddenly, 'four of you, fire at the steersmen.'

Three shots rang out simultaneously, with the result that the two steersmen went down. But two more sprang to their places, seized the great rudder

oar, and the rowers toiling hard, the progress of the junk was apparently not checked, and she came steadily on.

Two more shots rang out, mere cracks in the vast space, but the junk still kept on, till her bows touched the ground and her stern swung round parallel with the wharf, while her crew uttered a fierce yell and crowded to the side; but they were some fifteen feet away from the wharf-edge.

'Hah!' said Stan to himself. 'They mean business now;' for once more there was silence for a few moments before the old tactics were carried out, a signal was given, and full warning afforded to the defenders that the enemy was coming on. For on each junk men rushed forward and aft to begin belabouring the great hanging gongs with all their might, and this formed the accompaniment to a terrific chorus of yells.

'I should have liked to go down and see poor Mr Blunt once more,' said Stan to himself; 'but I dare not go now.'

Then he started, for his words suddenly assumed a strange significance. It seemed to him as if his seeing Blunt once more meant that it would be for the last time, and something like a shudder ran through him.

He made an effort, however, and it was gone, leaving him firm and ready to an extent that startled him, for he could not believe that in the face of such terrible danger it would last.

There was no more thinking then. The enemy, keeping up the horrible din which was evidently intended to terrify the defenders of the *hong* into

submission, came pouring now from the various junks, some over the sides to leap down from bulwark to wharf, some through the regular gangway, and those from the freshly returned junk making no scruple about dropping from the rail at the nearest point down into the river, to wade or swim ashore. The manœuvre resulted in several unfortunates being crowded down, to rise after an interval, and in several instances to be swept away by the sharp current now running between the side of the junk and the wharf, where, as fast as the assailants gathered, they rushed yelling to the tea-chest barrier and began to climb.

All was wild excitement on the part of the assailants, who, as they pushed one another up, to be pulled up in turn by those at the top, kept up a continuous chorus of savage abuse and threats of the way that they would treat their victims as soon as they got them down; but the furious outburst seemed to have not the slightest effect upon the defenders, who, crouching well below their barricades, remained perfectly calm and firm. They knew their cut-out task, and contented themselves with the delivery of a well-directed shot now and again. There would be a well-concealed loophole, with nothing visible to the attacking pirates, giving them perfect confidence that the defenders were hiding away from them, and then all at once there followed a sharp, pale spurt of flame, a little puff of smoke, and some leading man of the attacking party would go down from the top of the wall, where he had been urging his followers on, while as he fell it was as often as not to lie perfectly motionless, unnoticed by his

people; though upon some occasions, after staggering and falling, he would struggle to his hands and knees and crawl out of the hurrying crowd, to try and creep back to one or other of the junks.

But as fast as one man went down several came on in his place, and in a very short space of time the whole of the narrow alley between wall and store was full of hurrying fighting-men, carrying on the former tactics of battering with their weapons at door and window, some of the storming party holding their ground and keeping on thrusting their spears in savagely wherever there was a loophole to which they could gain access.

'Keep cool,' shouted Stan, though for his own part he seemed on fire. 'They'll get tired of hammering at the place in time.'

'Hadn't we better try and shoot more of them, sir?' said one of the clerks.

'No; you must only shoot their leaders. If we went on firing at the crowd we should soon have no cartridges left.—What does that shouting mean?'

He raised himself a little to try and see the reason for a fresh burst of shouting below the window where he was watching.

The answer came at once, after a peculiar odour, and in the shape of a blazing earthenware pot of inflammable material which was thrown from the top of the tea-chest wall with such accuracy that it came flaring and fuming right in through the narrow opening, to fall heavily beyond Stan.

One such blazing missile, it was plain to all, would be sufficient to commence the destruction of the place, and in his excitement the young leader forgot his

status of chief and director, for he made a dash towards the blazing pot, to stoop, seize it, and hurl it out. But just as he was holding his breath to avoid the smoke and flame, he was sent backward by a sharp concussion, sitting down involuntarily, and then trying to recover himself; but before he could get upon his knees he saw the burning pot travelling back through the window-opening with so good an aim that it fell on the far side of the wall, just where the enemy were thickest.

The man who had thrown it back after upsetting his leader turned upon Stan with hands blackened with the horrible resinous compound, and a deprecating look on his countenance as he murmured something in his native language, before ending up with his version of the English word 'sorry.'

'All right,' shouted Stan, smiling, as he clapped the coolie on the shoulder. 'Bravo! Capital! Go on.'

The coolie's face lit up with satisfaction, and he turned sharply to field another blazing pot and return it as sharply as a clever wicket-keeper would a ball to the stumps which it had passed, and with such splendid effect that it struck and broke on one of the enemy, who was standing on the wall in the act of hurling another of the hideous missiles.

The effect was startling. In an instant the pirate's blue cotton frock was covered with the blazing resin, and uttering frightful yells, he leapt down into the crowd of his comrades in the shelter of the wall beneath, forcing several to share in his misfortune as they were lighting up more of the horrible missiles to hand up to him for throwing.

There was a burst of flame through a cloud of smoke, out of which Stan—fascinated into looking out—saw something alive flaring as it rushed here and there, making for a party of its fellows dashing up with more of the pots.

It was all done in a few seconds, and had any of the assailants been ready and noticed the lad watching, he would have been shot down. But every eye was directed at the blazing figure, and, to his horror, Stan saw the end of the tragedy. For the instinct of self-preservation had made them doubly callous to their comrade's sufferings. The man rushed on as if seeking help or in a blind effort to reach the river and plunge in; but he did not reach it of his own volition, being received upon the lowered spears of three or four of his comrades, and then he was thrust, shrieking horribly, over the edge of the wharf, a sullen puff of smoke from the surface of the water telling that the tragedy was at an end.

A frightful sensation of sickness made Stan's head swim as he dropped back to the floor just in time to escape being struck by another of the fiery missiles; but the faintness was driven off by excitement, and it was with perfectly clear brain that the lad saw the burning Asiatic grenade hurled back amongst the yelling assailants. This proved to be with an effect that checked further effort for the moment and sent two of the pirates running to the edge of the wharf, to plunge in and climb out again dripping, but with no worse injury than a few smarting burns.

Stan was awake to the danger that was rapidly increasing, for after seeing that the smoking patches of pitchy resin on the floor were innocuous, he ran

on towards where the far end of the great room was full of smoke, dreading greater mischief there; but, to his great relief, he found that, though quite half-a-dozen stink-pots had been hurled in through the windows, the coolies there had dashed them back at once. And here, too, he found that the enemy had suffered so painfully from their own weapons that the throwing had ceased.

Any doubt that might have lingered in the brains of the British defenders respecting the amount of confidence that might be placed in the Chinese labourers was now completely driven away; for though the men had been burned about the hands by the missiles they had returned, they made very light of the pain, laughing and congratulating one another upon the retaliation they had been able to inflict, for Stan soon gathered that here no less than three of the enemy had been seen to rush shrieking to the edge of the wharf and plunge in.

There was a brief cessation now from the attack, and the defenders, whose vision was a good deal obscured by the smoke that hung in the place, made out that the throwers were hanging back from where several stink-pots were burning away in the shelter of the wall, some of the men protesting loudly as one of their leaders furiously urged them on, and ended by trying to set his followers an example by stepping forward, seizing one of the vessels, coming back into sight again with the pot flaming as he held it by its loose handle, and then making a rush to a breach where a portion of the tea-chest wall had been torn down.

The act was one of barbaric bravery, and Stan

saw him reach the top, swinging the pot to and fro and making the flames roar as they rushed away from his hands. Then as his arm was reached out backwards to its fullest extent, and he was about to launch the horrible missile at the opening in front, there was the sharp crack of a rifle, and he fell forward, pitching headlong to the ground beneath the window, while the blazing pot struck the stonework close to the foundation of the building, broke up, and went on blazing and sending up a dense cloud of pitchy smoke.

'Dead?' said the man who had fired, for Stan had reached forward to look out, but drew back again coughing.

'It's impossible to see,' he cried. 'The smoke is blinding.'

'And it will be setting something on fire,' said another voice out of the smoke.

'Ah! that's right,' cried Stan, for the big coolie who had taken his place near them pressed forward with a bucket of water, which he set down while he thrust out his head to see exactly where the danger lay, before picking up the bucket again, reaching out, and dribbling the water down a little at a time, producing a cloud of steam to mingle with the black smoke, and putting an end to all danger of a fire starting at the lower barricaded windows.

As the cloud of steam and smoke passed off, one of the clerks risked thrusting out his head from the next window, but withdrew it sharply, for it resulted in a hasty discharge of *jingals* from the deck of the nearest junk.

'Hurt?' cried Stan, rushing to where the clerk had staggered back.

'Yes, sir, horribly,' was the reply. 'Something—a piece of iron—or—a—a bullet—caught me—here—and'——

The words came at short intervals, and sounded confused. For the speaker was feeling about his head and neck, and drawing in his breath with pain.

'One moment,' cried Stan, reaching out a hand to take something from where it had lodged just within the poor fellow's collar.

'Yes, that must have been it,' he said wonderingly. 'Bit of stone. Hit me on the side of the head. But that couldn't have come out of one of their matchlocks.'

'No,' said Stan; 'it must have been chipped off the side of the window.'

'And there's only a lump coming here. Doesn't bleed, does it, sir?'

'No,' replied Stan. 'You had a lucky escape.'

'What a close shave! Never mind; a miss is as good as a mile,' added the young fellow cheerily. 'I saw the captain, though, or whatever he is, lying down at the foot of the warehouse quite dead.'

'Are you sure?' asked Stan, with his face contracted.

'Oh yes—quite. He wouldn't be lying doubled up as he is if he were only wounded. I say, Mr Lynn, that wasn't a bad shot.'

'No; excellent, and just in the nick of time. Who fired it?'

'Well,' said the young man, hesitating and speaking as if he were not so proud of the effort after further consideration, 'I fired straight at him, as I thought, just as he was in the act of flinging that blazing pot; but I can't say I am sure that I hit him.'

'But you are sure that he is dead?' replied Stan quietly. 'Pray be cautious, though. Don't run such a risk by looking out again.'

'You may take my word for it I won't, sir,' said the young clerk, patting the side of his head softly as he spoke. 'One taste like this will act as a reminder for some time.—Hullo! Look out. They've begun again.'

There was proof of a renewal of the attempt to destroy the place by fire in the presence of another of the pirates' hand-shells, for one came sailing in through the farthest window, to break up with a crash about the middle of the flooring; and the defenders had a fine exemplification of the dangers to which they were exposed in seeing the half-liquid contents of the pot begin to flow, blazing steadily, in all directions.

One of the coolies rushed up at once to spread the contents of a bucket of water all over the burning patch, while another, regardless of the pain, ran here and there catching up the flame-licked fragments of the pot from where they had fallen, and kept on hurling them like little smoke-tailed comets back through the window-opening.

'More water,' shouted Stan, as the burning patch began to add another odour to its own, a fine, pungent smoke beginning to mingle with the dense

black fume, indicating that the floor boards were beginning to catch.

'No, no, sir; this will be best,' said one of the warehousemen, and he dragged one of the silk-bales away from the nearest window.

'But that will catch fire,' said Stan.

'Too closely pressed together, sir,' was the reply.—'Here, you two, draw that backwards and forwards over the fire to smother it out.'

The two coolies caught at the suggestion, and seizing the bale together, they began to push it here and there over the burning place, with the effect of rapidly smothering out the flaming pitch, dense black smoke alone rising wherever the bale was passed; but unfortunately a heated gas kept on ascending from the blackened boards, and that caught fire again with a little explosion as the bale glided away.

Perseverance won, however, but none too soon, for all danger had hardly been swept away before another of the pots came hissing and fuming in, but without breaking; and this was jerked out, sending the attacking party flying from the place where it was expected to fall, the painful examples they had seen making the assailants pretty careful now.

This one was followed by several more, and then, to the great relief of the defenders, there was a cessation, and the assailants could be seen gathering together as if to listen to a mandarin-like officer who was risking his life while talking vehemently to his followers, who had now drawn away from the walls and were collected close to the edge of the wharf, many glancing at the junks as if disposed to rush on board.

'They're beginning to turn tail now,' said Stan to the warehouseman who had spoken out so firmly. 'I think we had better give them a volley and start them off with a run.'

'I'm afraid that it would be just as likely to enrage them all the more.'

'Yes, sir,' said Lawrence, Stan's lieutenant; 'perhaps we had better wait; but my fingers are itching to bring down that captain, or chief, or whatever he is.'

'He seems to be urging them on,' said Stan thoughtfully—very thoughtfully, for he had an idea in his head, one that would give the man a chance for his life, which might not be the case if he told his lieutenant to fire.

For now that the attack had ceased and the pirates' fiery missiles had left off making his nerves quiver at the prospect of the fire gaining the mastery and driving them out of their stronghold, the lad felt anything but bloodthirsty; while he thought that if this leader, who seemed now to be the most prominent of all, were disabled, his followers might set the example of taking to flight.

'Look here,' said the lad suddenly; 'I think I could hit that man from here.'

'Of course you could, sir,' cried his lieutenant eagerly. 'I saw how you were firing at first and never seemed to miss. Will you have a try?'

Stan made no reply, but stood fingering his rifle for a few moments before, to the great delight of the party of defenders, he sank down on one knee, resting the barrel of his piece upon a bale, and then waited and watched the Chinaman who was haranguing his men wildly as he stood just at the edge of the wharf,

now and then raising his arms as he pointed again and again at the great store.

As he finished there was a tremendous shout, and every man of the crowd of listeners began to wave his spear or sword.

Just then the crowd opened out as if to form in two parties for a rush at the warehouse, leaving their leader standing out quite clear, his tall, commanding figure looking huge in the sunshine.

'Here they come! Look out!' arose from within, and the whole body were in motion, when—

Crack!

The sharp report of Stan's rifle was heard, followed by the floating up of a puff of gray smoke, and the sound seemed to act like magic, for the attacking party stood fast, staring in amazement at their chief, whose legs suddenly doubled up beneath him, and he fell back into the arms of two men who rushed forward to his help.

'Good shot!' cried several of the defenders.

'A dead man,' said Stan's lieutenant.

'I was afraid I could not do it,' said Stan, smiling; 'but he 's not a dead man, for I only fired at his legs. Look! they 're carrying him on board the junk.'

It was as the lad said: several of the men from the crowd went back to help, while the rest stood fast watching and waiting as if, losing their heads, they had suddenly been struck with a feeling of indecision. All the wild, savage desire for destruction had been discharged like so much electricity at the touch of a rod, and a feeling of hopefulness sprang up amongst the defenders as they could see that the whole of the attacking party were now

gathered into groups talking eagerly, so that there was a low, buzzing hum instead of the chorus of savage yells and threats.

'Where 's Wing?' said Stan suddenly, as a thought struck him respecting taking advantage of the lull. 'I know: he is with Mr Blunt. One of you go and tell him to send the servants with anything he can get together in the way of food. Another of you bring a bucket of drinking-water up here.'

The orders were carried out, and with watchful eyes and rifles ready to hand, the whole party partook of the rough refreshments passed round, the water proving, in their excited state, the principal object to which they directed their attention.

Wing limped up to Stan as soon as he had performed his task, to announce that Mr Blunt had gone 'fas' 'sleep. Velly weak; can'tee sit up. Dlinkee big lot wateh.'

Stan longed to go and see his chief, but duty kept him there watching the actions of the men still crowding the wharf, till some one in authority began to shout, when his followers crept up together as if for a fresh attack.

This brought the refreshing to a hasty end, every man hurrying at once to his post, but only to set up a subdued cheer, for, to Stan's intense delight, the next order seemed to be one for making the fighting-men separate into half-a-dozen different parties, as if drilled to certain movements; but it only proved to be for forming up in the divisions belonging to each junk, on to which they now began to file, either direct from the wharf or across the nearest vessels to their own.

'They've had enough of it, sir,' said one of the clerks excitedly. 'Hadn't we better give them a cheer and a few parting shots?'

'No,' said Stan thoughtfully; 'it would only be wasting ammunition. I can't quite believe in their giving up so easily.'

'Easily!' said another to one of his companions. 'Not much of that. Look at the dead and wounded.'

There was no need to draw attention to the poor wretches lying about, for their horrible presence was a burden to every one in the warehouse. Many were lying dead where they had received the fatal bullets, but many more lay where they had crawled painfully so as to get into shelter, evidently in the full expectation that if they did not get under cover they would be made the mark for fresh bullets. And oddly enough, as it seemed to the defenders, the cover most affected was the tea-chest wall, where those who crawled up lay close, with only a leg or arm visible to the watchers at the windows. They were, of course, so near that their groans came floating in through the openings, and now that they were *hors de combat* Stan became exercised in his mind as to whether he ought not to take some steps to give the poor wretches water, and he suggested it to his lieutenant.

'Yes,' said the latter, 'I've been thinking something of the kind, sir; but it would be terribly risky work. They are savages to a man, and as likely as not they would turn upon the hand that came to their help. You see, they're sure to have their knives and swords with them, and some of them their rifles. There, for instance,' he continued, pointing

through the window where they stood to the stock of a *jingal* whose barrel was out of sight, being close under the wall where its owner lay.

'Yes, I 'm afraid it would be risky; but if I went with a bucket of water and a tin dipper they never could be such wretches as to turn upon me.'

'My dear sir,' was the reply, 'if one didn't another would. But you couldn't possibly do it.'

'I could, and I should feel plenty of confidence in their seeing what I meant.'

'Then your confidence would be misplaced, sir,' said the man decisively. 'They 'd all think you had gone out to poison them, and would turn upon you at once.'

'Oh, impossible!' cried Stan. 'They 'd be bound to see.'

'They 'd see, sir,' said the man firmly, 'but they wouldn't understand. Men who go about getting their living by slaughtering their fellow-creatures can't grasp the meaning of an act of self-denial. Besides, you couldn't go.'

'I could: why not?'

'Because you are captain, and can't leave your men.'

Stan made an impatient gesture.

'But I could, sir,' continued Laurence quietly; 'and if you order me I 'll go.'

Stan looked at him sharply.

'I mean it, sir,' said the man, with a peculiar smile; 'but all the same I hope you will not send me.'

'I can't,' said Stan. 'How can I send you where I hold back from going myself?'

At that moment the man stretched out his hand sharply and caught the lad by the arm.

'What's that for?' said Stan sharply.

'Look in that first junk.'

'Yes; I'm looking. They're getting ready to hoist sail and go—— No! I see now. They're afraid to come to close quarters. They're loading that gun.'

'That's right; and the crews of the other junks are at the same game.'

CHAPTER XXIX.

'ONE CARTRIDGE LEFT.'

THERE was no doubt about the matter, for as they were speaking a tiny curl of smoke began to rise from the middle of the group of busy men on the nearest junk, and Stan's voice rose, sounding hoarse and deep:

'Begin firing again, slow and careful shots, at the men carrying the matches. Stop; I'll begin.'

He took aim across the bale of silk behind which he was kneeling, and—though he did not see it, others did plainly—the linstock flew up, jerked from the holder's hand, described a curve, and fell overboard to be extinguished.

There was a yell at this, and half-a-dozen men or so began discharging their matchlocks at the window from which the accurate shot had come; while directly after there was a roar from another junk, whose men had charged their brass gun unseen, and the contents went crashing and spattering about the opening, making a great uproar, but doing very little harm.

It was a disillusionment for the defenders which roused them to a feeling of bitterness and nerved every one present with determination, and the duel between the junks and the *hong* went on fiercely, but

with no serious harm to the defenders. The attacking party, however, suffered terribly, man after man of the crews, if they can be so called, of the guns falling killed or wounded from the slow, steady, accurate fire which picked off with almost unerring precision those who loaded and those who fired the junks' artillery, till the pirates yelled with rage and fury, crowding over one another to take the disabled men's places.

Meanwhile, in spite of the nerve-shattering discharges whenever the swivel-guns were fired, Stan's followers kept up their slow, steady, irregular reply. Sometimes minutes passed without a rifle being fired, for want of what was looked upon as a good opportunity; and then shot after shot would snap out from one or another window, giving the enemy the work of carrying off as many dead or disabled men.

Again and again Stan deluded himself into the belief, caused by the cessation of the firing, that the enemy were once more out of heart; but the pauses proved to be only due to the failure of ammunition or a difficulty in bringing up the lighted match, and the firing recommenced, and more gunners were in retaliation shot down.

'At last!' cried Stan exultantly, after the hottest passage of the attack yet endured, when all at once the firing ceased. 'Look! they've had some accident; that big junk is on fire.'

He pointed needlessly to a great body of smoke which seemed to be rising amidships of the first-coming junk but the last to be moored.

'Yes, there's something wrong there,' said his lieutenant excitedly. 'No, no, no! Look out! Here they come.'

To a man the defenders drew a deep breath, and their hands went to their bandoliers to feel for cartridges. For it was plain enough: discouraged but enraged by the ill-success of their firing, the Chinese leaders had given their orders to their men, who needed no inciting, but began pouring over the sides of the vessels again, many of them bearing their abominable fire-pots, of which a number had been made ready in the hold of one of the junks; and, without leaders or any formation beyond that of a yelling, surging crowd, the enemy began running up to the *hong* to gain the shelter of the wall of chests.

Here there was a halt for a few seconds till the front wall was crowded, while not a shot was fired by the defenders, who, in full expectation of what was coming, had seen their young leader order up two-thirds of the coolies, one half to deal with the fire-pots, and return them blazing amongst the enemy, and the other to be ready with buckets and bales to smother out any fire which might arise.

The smoke of the pots was rising in a cloud from the front of the wall, and though they could not see, the defenders surmised correctly enough that the bearers of the direful missiles were swinging them in the air to get them into a high state of combustion before beginning the assault; and all waited with knitted brows, wondering how long it would be before the bewildering roar of the gongs began again, for the delay seemed, in their over-excited state, to be long and strange.

Just when the excitement of waiting was becoming unbearable, there was a diversion, the quaint-looking, pig-tailed head of Wing rising slowly from the stair-

way, followed by the rest of him, and he began to limp painfully towards where Stan crouched rifle in hand, with its deadly charge waiting to bring down the first prominent leader upon whom he could bring the sight to bear.

He was about the only one of the defenders who did not see the coming of Wing, and he started as he felt the man's soft fingers touch his arm.

'Ah, you, Wing!' he cried sharply. 'What do you want here?'

'Misteh Blunt send Wing young Lynn.'

'Hah! Then he is awake?'

Wing nodded.

'Is he better?'

'No. Velly bad. Say smokee chokee. Tell Wing come say you takee ca'e fi' no get to magazine and blow up allee ca'tlidge.'

'Yes, yes; I'll take care. Tell him we are doing our best, Wing, and that I can't come down to see him.'

'No; can'tee come down. B'long wa'ehouse. Mustee stop kill big lot pilate.'

'Go down now, Wing,' said Stan impatiently. 'You'll only be in the way here.'

'Yes, go down soon fight begin.'

'And stay with Mr Blunt; he may want water.'

'No stay 'long Misteh Blunt—no. Say Wing makee 'self useful. B'long wa'ehouse now. Stop see if fi' begin to buln, and put um out 'gain with bucketee wateh.'

'Very well; do that, then.'

'Yes, Wing go stand 'longside ca'tlidge place. See no stinkee-pot come floo.'

'Yes; good. Be off; I 'm going to fire.'

'Go fi'?' said Wing. 'Yes; no shootee Wing. Get 'way now.'

It was quite time, as the Chinaman felt. Limping along the floor, he made for the stairway, and had just reached it when, with a roar and dash, the fierce enemy climbed to the top of the little wall and began to discharge their *jingals* and fire-pots, no less than three of these latter falling inside at the first discharge.

It was a repetition of the first assault, but carried on with more savage energy, in spite of the calm, steady reply in single shots from the defenders, who kept to their former tactics, with the result that nearly every time a rifle sent forth its jet of flame and faint puff of smoke it meant a message of death or temporary disablement to some miscreant who was more prominent than his fellows in the assault.

But they were as far, apparently, as ever from carrying the place, and when, enraged by their ill-success, about a score of the most desperate dropped from the wall to try and batter in the doors, covered by a fierce discharge of the fire-pots through the windows above, Stan, terrible as the time was, felt an old incident of schoolboy life flash across his brain.

It was no time of fire, although it was mimic battle royal, for it was an episode of snowballing when the weaker side were driven to take flight and shelter themselves behind the dwarf wall of the covered-in portion of the playground, where no snow had of course fallen, while just outside it lay piled up consequent upon the roof having been swept after a

While one or two were in an instant blazing.

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heavy fall. Stan and his fellows were therefore in the position of being without ammunition, while their adversaries were standing knee-deep in the midst of abundance.

There seemed to be nothing left but ignominious surrender, when the idea occurred to Stan which enabled his party to turn the tables. It was merely to catch the ready-made balls of snow and return them instantly to the throwers. And with this memory coming to him in the emergency, just when the stink-pots were coming thickest and the doors below threatened to give way to the battering and hacking they received from the furious party beneath the windows, Stan brought his coolies together and gave his orders, which were to raise the blazing pots with crowbars and carry them to the openings over the threatened doors, after the barricading bales had been dragged away; and then, just when the attack was at its worst, two half-dozens of the blazing grenades were quietly dropped at once amongst the constituents of the Chinese forlorn-hope.

The effect was as instantaneous as it was horrible. Several of the men at each door were splashed with the burning resinous material, while one or two were in an instant blazing. There was a wild yelling of pain and despair, and, as much to avoid their fellows as the missiles flung after them, the whole of the attacking party took to flight to gain the other side of the wall, such of them as were burning making for the river.

This stopped the assault upon the doors, but only increased the fury of the enemy's firing from their shelters, while more blazing pots were being brought

rapidly down from the junks, to be handed up to the throwers and then hurled in as before.

'Never mind,' shouted Stan; 'we've checked them a bit. Fire away at the men who bring the stink-pots.—Eh—what? Getting to the last cartridges? Plenty more.—Here, Mr Lawrence,' he continued, turning to his lieutenant; 'there's a whole case in the magazine; fetch them up.'

'Is the trap-door locked?' said the man thoughtfully.

'No—only shut down. Quick! We must not slacken our fire now.'

Lawrence placed his rifle against the breastwork from behind which he had been bringing down enemy after enemy, ran along the great store floor, and narrowly escaped being hit by one of the fiery missiles which came flying in; but he reached the broad stairway in safety, plunged down, and returned in a marvellously short space of time with an open case of ammunition in his hands.

'Here, cartridges—cartridges!' shouted two of his fellows as he hurried by where they were firing; but he paid no heed to their cries, trotting on to where Stan was as busy as the rest, and with a fierce growl banged the case at his feet.

'Well done!' shouted Stan. 'Quick! Hand the packets round. What!' he cried. 'Dripping wet?'

'Yes!' cried the bearer of the case and the most dire news that could be carried to men in so sore a strait—treachery. 'The trap-door was thrown back, and some cursed scoundrel had emptied a bucket into the open chest. Look! The cases are saturated.

I had to pour a gallon of water out into the iron bucket that was standing just below.'

Stan's jaw dropped, and he stared for a moment or two helplessly at Lawrence.

The cry of 'Cartridges—this way!' brought him back to himself.

'Patience!' he shouted as loudly as he could, and throwing open the breech of his rifle, he took out the full cartridge waiting to be fired and replaced it in his bandolier. Then, to break open one of the little packets in which the contents of the fresh case were wrapped, he snapped the string and tore off the sodden paper, which, as he crushed it in his hand and then dropped it, fell with a soft dab on the floor.

The next instant he had placed one of the new cartridges in the chamber of his rifle, closed the breech, turned, took aim at once at the most active of the *jingal* bearers, and drew trigger.

Click!

Just the falling of the hammer, and nothing more.

'That is the last case,' said Stan softly, and without showing the slightest emotion, as he merely withdrew the little cylinder, to whose detonator the water had evidently penetrated, though part of the powder might still have remained unspoiled.

'Yes, sir, the very last. What's to be done now?'

'One moment,' said Stan quietly as he once more put in the dry cartridge from his bandolier. 'Just you try one from another packet,' he whispered.—'Halt!' he shouted down the room. 'Cease firing.—Now try one.'

Another packet from the next layer was tried, but the wrapper was if anything wetter, and a *click!* was the result.

'Oh, they 're all spoiled,' said Lawrence bitterly. 'The game 's up, so only let us die fighting.'

'Of course,' said Stan coolly enough; 'but we 've not used our revolvers yet. We 'll give them a volley from our rifles, and then we must take to our pistols and wait till they come to close quarters.'

'What do you say to retreating to the office after the volley, and then defending the door as the brutes try to get at us? The revolvers will tell splendidly there, too, as we shall be firing into the dense mob who crowd into the passage.'

'The very thing,' said Stan; 'and we shall be defending Mr Blunt at the same time. Of course; and we must set the coolies at work then to help us with their knives.'

'Yes,' said Stan's lieutenant, 'the coolies—Chinamen. Mr Lynn,' he cried in a hoarse whisper, 'it must have been one of those dogs who were to be ready to stop the fire with their buckets.'

'It couldn't have been,' said Stan. 'They were all up here.'

'Then it was that cunning Chinese fox, Wing,' growled Lawrence angrily; 'and if we 're to die he shall go first.'

'Oh, impossible!' said Stan excitedly.

'I 've got but one cartridge left,' shouted a man at the far end of the room.

'And I'—'And I'—'And I,' cried others, while some of the rest confessed to having two or three.

'And the enemy are coming on for a fresh attack of

some kind. There's quite a mob making for your window, Mr Lynn.'

'And they've got about a dozen stink-pots with them, sir,' cried another.

Stan glanced round, and there was the situation plainly enough. Some ten men were in the front of a cluster of about forty of the enemy, who were coming steadily on with levelled *jingals*, obviously making for the centre of the building.

'Now's your time, sir,' whispered the lieutenant. 'Let's give them one good roar.'

'Yes,' said Stan, and he shouted to the occupants of the other windows to close up round him and bring the coolies to stand ready for the fire-pots close behind.

The evolution, if such it can be called, was performed at once, the little party of riflemen placing themselves in three rows behind their barricade, the first kneeling, the second stooping a little to fire over their fellows' heads, and the back row perfectly upright, with the barrels of their rifles resting on the shoulders of the second line.

'We must risk the fire-pots, gentlemen,' said Stan; 'but I hope to give the wretches one good, startling volley before they are able to throw. Right into the thick of them, mind, and then, before the smoke rises, every man must dash down below and into the office. I mean to hold that now.'

'But hadn't we better fill up our belts first, sir, with cartridges?'

'They have all been soaked with water,' said Stan quietly. 'There has been treachery here.'

His words were received with a groan.

'Then it 's all over,' said one young fellow piteously.

'Not while we have our revolvers,' said Stan. 'We can stop them from reaching the office, I think, and our Chinese helpers will have a chance to do something then.'

A hearty cheer arose at this, for the cloud of despondency that was gathering had been chased away, and once more every eye was bright and nerves strung for the final effort.

'They 're nearly close enough,' said Stan quietly. 'When they are at the densest, and the order is given to advance, I shall utter the word. Then fire right into the centre; never mind the fire-pot throwers. Let 's try to startle them if we can.'

There was a low murmur of assent, and then all waited, glaring past the bristling barrels of their rifles at the coming enemy, who, contrary to their former action, now crowded closely together as they came in something like discipline, their movements pointing to the fact that they were about to deliver fire from their *jingals* and then to make a rush. What they intended with the stink-pots which were being carried was not evident until they were closer in, when the fire-bearers struck off suddenly to the left as if to deliver them from a fresh point.

At this moment, as if to excite and drive the party on into making a more desperate attack, and to fill the defenders with dismay, the gongs on every junk suddenly boomed out with a terrific din; the fresh party uttered a yell, and then stopped short to fire.

Stan's voice was almost drowned, but not quite. There was enough of his order heard to animate his

little body of defenders. Trigger was drawn before a single match could be lowered upon the powder-pans of the *jingals*, and the rifles made almost one report, their bullets tearing through the group of pirates, who were not twenty yards away. Then, blind to the effect of their volley, screened as everything was by the smoke, the defenders started back from the window and hurried down the stairway to make for the office, where Blunt, to the surprise of all, was found sitting back in a cane chair, with Wing assiduously operating to keep him cool with a palm-leaf fan.

'Wouldn't stop lying down,' began Wing to the nearest man; but his explanation was not heeded, the men preparing to barricade their keep, only leaving space for the rest to file in.

CHAPTER XXX.

'TO CERTAIN DEATH?'

N the minutes that elapsed before the enemy could make their way into the deserted portion of the defences Stan and his Englishmen worked hard, making the coolies bring in a sufficiency of water for the hot and thirsty, while watch and ward was kept, and wonder was expressed as to what had been done with the stink-pots.

'I'm expecting,' said the lieutenant, 'that we shall know by the crackling of burning wood what has become of them.'

But there was nothing to break the silence, no rush to indicate that the enemy had climbed in, and all attempts made to take an observation from the chinks of the boarded-up windows of the office were useless; for these latter only resulted in the examiners seeing the far-stretching verdant country, no sweep of the river being visible from that portion of the building.

'What does it mean?' said Stan at last. 'Some trap?'

All listened again for some minutes before Stan, pistol in hand, led the way to the foot of the warehouse stairs, where they stood listening for a few

minutes before the lad planted his foot on the first step.

'No, no, sir; let me lead,' whispered his lieutenant—'let me go this time. The first thing you'll hear will be the swish of one of their great swords. They're lying ready to take off the heads of all who begin to show.'

'But we must get to know what they're doing,' said Stan.

'Then let the carpenters take down the top plank of one of the doors, sir; it's only screwed, and we can see everything then. If they begin with their spears, a volley from our pistols will drive them back till the board is screwed on.'

'But I don't believe that any one can be upstairs after all,' cried Stan impatiently. 'How foolish to have all the windows closed up without leaving a hole!'

'Hasn't proved very foolish, sir,' said the lieutenant dryly, 'according to my ideas. Holes for us to peep out at mean places for the enemy to send spears through. Where we could reach from inside they could get at from outside.'

'Listen,' said Stan; and for nearly five minutes silence was maintained, without a sound being heard.

'There!' whispered Stan triumphantly; 'do you mean to tell me that the enemy would be able to keep as still as that if they were up there?'

'I'm afraid they would if they had laid a trap for us.'

'Oh, impossible!' replied Stan.

'Perhaps you are right, sir,' said the lieutenant;

'but I've been working out here in China for the last twenty years, mixing with the people and learning their ways, and I'm ready to say that they're about the most artful beggars under the sun.'

'Then you really believe that they are upstairs in hiding?'

'I do, sir. What is it they want to do?'

'Murder us, of course.'

'Exactly; and they've been trying to do that for the last hour, losing men heavily all the time. Force has done no good, and now they're trying some artful trick to get hold of us without losing any more men.'

'Then why don't they burn us out? That seems to be the most likely thing to do.'

'Yes; only they'd burn all the rich loot they want to take. They haven't attacked us here for nothing. Of course, they'd go back rejoicing after hacking us to pieces, but they don't want to sail away back with empty junks.'

'There's something in that,' said Stan thoughtfully.

'It's a trap, sir, and if you want any proof of their cunning, you've just had one over those cartridges.'

Stan frowned and looked sharply in the speaker's eyes.

'You don't doubt that it was Chinese work?'

'No,' whispered back Stan; 'we must have a traitor among us.'

'Yes; one who felt that the enemy would get the upper hand.'

'Do you know who did it?'

'I think so, sir,' was the reply; 'and did at first, though I've had my doubts since.'

'Well, that's all over. What we want to see now is whether the enemy are on the upper floor.'

'I say they are, sir; and if one of us goes up, the next thing we shall hear will be a horrible thud from one of their swords, and we shall be a man short.'

Stan stood listening in silence again for a few moments, gazing up the stairs from out of the semi-darkness into the light which came down from above.

'I don't care,' he said at last; 'there's something more in this than you say.'

'Perhaps so, sir; but the grim death I can see is quite enough for me.'

'You're all wrong, and I'm going up to see what's the meaning of this silence.'

'What's the good, sir?'

'The good?' cried Stan. 'What an absurd question! To know, of course.'

'And what's the good of your knowing when you won't be able to tell us?'

'You mean I should be killed at a blow, and not be able to come back and say what I had seen?'

'Of course, sir.'

'Ah, well!' said Stan bitterly, 'that wouldn't matter. If you didn't hear me cry out, you'd know you were right by my not coming back. Now then, lend me another pistol, and I'll rush up at once.'

The lieutenant glanced round at those who were with him, and then stepped before the lad.

'You're not going to run such a risk, sir,' he said.

'What! Who's going to stop me?'

'I am, sir; and the rest are going to help me.'

'Mr Blunt put me in command, for all of you to obey me.'

'Yes, sir, to defend the place—fight for it with us.'

'And you are beginning a mutiny,' cried Stan angrily.

'No, sir; only going to stop you from doing a mad thing.'

'Mad?'

'Yes; going to throw your life away, when we want you to help us.'

Stan hesitated.

'I don't want to do anything mad,' he said more quietly. 'But we must know the meaning of what is going on upstairs and outside. The enemy may be laying a mine to blow us all up.'

'No, they may not, sir. In their selfish cunning they will not do anything to destroy the place.'

'Absurd!' cried Stan. 'Why, they've been trying since the beginning to burn the place down.'

'Oh no, sir; there you're wrong. Only to drive us out—stifle us with their stink-pots. As soon as they had done that they would have been the first to drown out any fire that had taken hold. Come, sir; I've fought my best and tried to prove to you that I was staunch, so take my advice—wait.'

'No one could have been more brave and true,' cried Stan warmly. 'Forgive me if I have spoken too hotly, but don't try and stop me now. I must make a dash for it.'

'It's your duty to Mr Blunt and your people, sir, to stand fast and order us to go up.'

'To certain death?'

'Yes, if it means it, sir.'

'Then you have your doubts,' cried Stan. 'There! I'm going to make a rush up. Who'll follow?'

'All of us,' came in a burst.

'Ready, then,' cried Stan, cocking his pistol. 'Now then; once more—ready?'

No one spoke, but there was a sharp clicking of pistol-locks, and then a pause, while Stan stood with his left foot on the second stair, ready to bound up, but listening intently.

'No one there,' he said in a sharp whisper, and rushed up into the light.

CHAPTER XXXI.

'A TRAITOR.'

O movement above him, no swish and horrible thud of a great two-handed sword, but a free course for the lad to spring from the last step into the long room, its blackened, pitch-besmirched floor covered with charred patches, and pieces of pitch, broken pots, and, above all, scores of empty cartridge-cases lying scattered about, and all lit up by the bright sunshine which streamed in through the open barricaded windows.

Stan stopped short, with his followers crowding up and pressing upon him, pistol in hand, and gave a sharp look at every barricade to see if any of the enemy were crouching behind the holes in the window-opening; and, satisfied that the place was free, he waved one of the revolvers he held above his head and led off in a wild and excited—

'Hip! hip! hip! hurrah!'

The shout was taken up and repeated with all the force of his companions' lungs, while as the lad made a rush to the nearest window and gazed out on to the river, his lips parted for another cheer and his revolver-armed hand rose for a fresh wave.

But his lips closed again, his hand dropped to his

side, and nothing but a hoarse, murmuring sound came forth in the words:

'I can't—I can't; I 'm dead-beat now.'

'Hold up, my lad!' cried the lieutenant wildly as he sprang forward just in time to catch Stan as he reeled, and eased him down into a sitting position upon one of the bales, supporting the lad's head against his breast. 'Where are you hurt?'

'Nowhere,' said Stan in half-suffocated tones. 'Done up, I suppose—too much for me. Water, please. Here,' he added feebly, 'give the cowards one more cheer. No, no,' he added huskily and with more animation; 'we 've all done enough. Thank you!'

He took the tin of water dipped for him from one of the buckets brought up for extinguishing fire, drank with avidity, and then rose and staggered to the bucket-side, dropped upon his knees, and bent over to bathe his burning temples and smarting eyes.

'Hah!' he ejaculated as he rose and began drying his face with his blackened handkerchief. 'It was very weak and cowardly, but I couldn't help it. Sort of reaction, I suppose, after such a strain. I can't help feeling a bit ashamed.'

'Of being so cowardly, sir?' said the lieutenant dryly.

'Yes; it was very weak,' replied Stan.

'Oh yes, very,' said the lieutenant, with a curious croak in his throat. 'I never saw such a cowardly lot as we all are in my life.—Eh, lads?'

A wild, half-hysterical laugh arose from the party, and the next minute a most absurd performance was

gone through, the men all beginning to shake hands with one another, the biggest fellow present with tears running down his cheeks.

'Shocking cowards, all of us, Mr Lynn,' said the lieutenant huskily; 'but we 've sent them flying with fleas in their ears.'

'Yes, yes,' cried Stan excitedly now, as he fast recovered from his weakness. 'Oh! it was bravely done, but you ought to have had a man to lead you. Here, we must go down and let Mr Blunt hear the news.'

'Yes, directly,' said the lieutenant; 'but when I tell him—I mean, *we* tell him—all that has been done, I think I know what he 'll say.'

'Say?' cried Stan, staring at the speaker. 'What will he say?'

'That he couldn't have done it better himself.'

A tremendous cheer arose at this, and the colour began to return to the young leader's face, while to turn the conversation, which was growing painful, Stan suddenly said, addressing all:

'Why, it must have been that last volley!'

'Yes,' said the lieutenant; 'that was too much for them. They stopped, though, to carry off all their wounded.'

This last was said as they stood gazing out of the windows at the six great junks gliding slowly up against the current with all sail set, but no remark was made about the way in which the broad river was dotted with ghastly-looking objects floating away with the stream and, fortunately for those at the *hong*, fast growing more distant; but all knew how busy the defeated enemy must have been

plunging those who had fallen into the river before they sailed away.

'Now let us go down, sir, and see if Mr Blunt is well enough to hear the news.'

'Yes; he ought to have been told before.'

'We left him half-asleep,' said the lieutenant meaningly. ''I wouldn't wake a wounded man, sir, even to give him the best of news.'

'Perhaps it would be best to wait,' said Stan wearily, and looking as if all the spirit in him before had completely gone.

'Feel done up, sir?'

'Yes, horribly,' replied Stan as they reached the head of the stairs, and both glanced round and then looked in each other's eyes.

'What were you looking round for?' said Stan.

'To see that there was no sign of fire anywhere about. Weren't you?'

'Yes,' said Stan. 'How horribly the place smells!' Then, with his thoughts reverting to the late engagement: 'I say, the enemy must have lost very heavily.'

'Awfully, sir,' said the man; and then meaningly, 'Didn't you see the crows?'

Stan's brave companion was alluding to a long line of dusky birds that were following the dismal objects floating in direful procession down the river, and coming up from all directions to join their friends.

'Yes,' said the lad, with a shudder, 'I saw them;' and at the same minute a voice came from behind, one of the party calling the attention of another to the same strange piece of animal instinct.

'I say,' he said, 'look how the crows are coming up. How can they know when there is a fight?'

He called them crows—the common term—but he meant vultures, the scavengers of the Chinese villages and towns.

Blunt was sleeping heavily, or rather, he was lying back in a state of semi-stupor, the result of his wounds and the exertion of moving when in so weak a state. Wing was at his side, busily wafting the fan to and fro, but closing it quickly from time to time to make a blow at some troublesome, obtrusive fly, but never hitting once.

'Still asleep?' said Stan in a whisper.

'Yes, sleep velly fast,' replied the man. 'Velly bad indeed. Hot in head now. Keep talkee. Say silly pidgin nonsense. Wanted get up and go 'way while all fight. Heah pilate shout. Wanted go see. Wing tly to 'top him. Say knock Wing down not get out o' way.—You been killee all pilate?'

'All? Nonsense,' said Stan wearily. 'But we 've driven them away.'

'Dlive allee 'way? Yes,' said Wing, nodding his head a good deal. 'Shoot, killee, flighten. Fly 'way like clows when shoot. But soon fo'get. Come back again like clows.'

'Come back like the crows?' said Stan.

'Yes. Shoot gun, all fly 'way. Fo'get soon; come back again to get good t'ings.'

'Do you mean you think the pirates will come back and attack?'

'Yes. Wing suah. Some day.'

'Do you think he is right?' said Stan, turning to his lieutenant.

'Yes, I'm afraid so,' was the reply. 'Not for some days, of course; but they have been disappointed of the plunder, and knowing it is here, they'll come again to try and get it and to pay us out for the number we have killed and wounded. There! don't talk about it now. Let's see about a meal being got ready.—You, Wing, I think you could leave Mr Blunt as he is. He can't do better than sleep.'

'No do betteh,' said the Chinaman. 'You say, go get dinneh leady? Wing glad. Do evelybody muchee good.'

'See about it, then,' said Stan, 'while we go and say a few words to the coolies—eh? Don't you think they ought to be praised for what they have done?'

'Yes,' was the lieutenant's reply; 'come and say a few words to them—not many—and tell them you are pleased with the way they fought. But tell them, too, that you'll have a good supper got ready for them by-and-by. That'll please them better than any amount of words.'

Stan led the way to where the Chinamen were chatting together about the fight and the way in which the enemy had been driven off; but they were eager enough to turn and listen to the lad's words. Their round faces brightened upon hearing the announcement about the feast they were to have, and they indulged in a hoarse cheer when their visitors left to join their companions. Then, after one of the doors had been opened, the little party stepped out into the bloodstained alley between the building and the impromptu wall, which, besides

being splashed with molten pitch and charred here and there, was horribly blotched in places by the gore of some wretched pirate who had been wounded or met his end.

'After what has been said, then,' said Stan sadly, 'it will not be safe to pull down these chests?'

'Well, I don't know yet. I think I'd leave them up till Mr Blunt has had a word or two to say to-morrow. I hope he'll be well enough to take a little interest in matters by then. There's no hurry. We'll have them put straight here and there to repair damages, but they may very well wait afterwards, as there's not likely to be any rain. But I say, Mr Lynn, what do you think about that bit of treachery? I was of opinion that it was Wing.'

'So was I at first, but he seems so calm and innocent.'

'Ah, yes! But you mustn't think a Chinaman innocent because he looks so. He's a mystery, you know. But still I have my doubts, and it worries me lest it should be one of the coolies. It would be so much worse then.'

'Why?' said Stan, looking wonderingly at his companion.

'Because they all belong to the same gang—are all members of one club—and if one of them proves to be a traitor, the bad sheep corrupts the whole flock.'

'What is to be done?' said Stan after a short, thoughtful pause.

'Nothing now, sir. We know there is a traitor amongst our men, but there is nothing to fear from that until the enemy come again. On further thought, however, I don't think it was Wing.'

'I'm very glad,' said Stan, 'for I believed in him, and I'm sure my father and uncle did. It must be one of the coolies, then. How are we to find out?'

'By going on quietly and not appearing to suspect. As I say, there is no immediate danger, and we have other things to think about. What do you propose doing first?'

'Asking your advice about Mr Blunt. I want to send for a doctor at once.'

'Ah, yes! But you ask my advice. Well, it is that you wait till the morning.'

'Wait till the morning? I want to send a boat with a messenger down the river to the port to bring back a doctor.'

'He could only bring a native one, and he has one now.'

'What! Wing? He is not a surgeon.'

'No; but he knows a great deal of that sort of thing. He has helped Mr Blunt to doctor the men often enough here, and I'd as soon trust him if I were wounded as I would an ordinary native surgeon. You see how well he has treated the governor already.'

'Roughly bandaged him up,' said Stan impatiently; 'but he may bleed to death in the night.'

'Not likely, sir. Wing plugged his wounds, and I looked to see that the bleeding had stopped.'

'But he may be bleeding internally.'

'No; I'm sure of that.'

'How can you tell without a proper examination?'

'By the state he is in.'

'Then you are a bit of a doctor?' said Stan rather dubiously.

'More of a surgeon, sir. We're obliged to be in these out-of-the-way places,' said his lieutenant, smiling.

'I know nothing, but I'm horribly anxious. How can you tell?'

'Simply enough, sir,' said the other. 'Where is his wound?'

'Right through the shoulder.'

'Very well; where would he bleed if it was not outside?'

'Why, inside, of course,' said Stan.

'Certainly; but where?'

'As I said—inside.'

'Inside is rather a vague term, sir. Well, look here; the wounds are quite high up?'

'Yes, very.'

'Then if he bled anywhere, it would be into the cavity of the chest.'

'I don't know anything about cavities, but of course it must be into the chest.'

'Exactly. Well, we know his heart isn't touched.'

'How?' said Stan.

'Because if it had been he would be a dead man.'

'I see.'

'Then no big arteries or veins are wounded. If they had been he would have been suffocated by the blood long enough ago.'

'Would he?'

'Of course. His lungs would have been choked with blood, so we know that they are not injured.'

'I see,' said Stan; 'but it's very horrible, isn't it?'

'I think not. Any one who learns things like this may find them very useful in an emergency. I do; and it gives a man confidence. I don't think Mr Blunt's wound is dangerous at all.'

'I do,' said Stan shortly. 'See how delirious he seems to have been.'

'That's only natural, sir. Fever sets in generally after a wound.'

'Oh, but you make too light of it,' cried Stan. 'He is shot right through the shoulder.'

'So much the better.'

'What!' cried Stan angrily. 'How can that be so much the better?'

'There is no fear of dangerous inflammation caused by the presence of the bullet, for we know that it isn't in him, and Nature has set to work before now to begin healing him up.'

'Without a doctor?'

'To be sure. She's a splendid surgeon, sir.'

'I wish I could feel as confident as you do,' said Stan.

'Well, learn all you can; you soon will.'

'Then you think we might wait till the morning?'

'Certainly. You and I will take it in turns to watch him through the night, and in the morning we shall see.'

'Very well,' said Stan; 'perhaps you are right, but I feel very anxious about Mr Blunt.'

'So do I, sir; but I feel sure that we are doing right.'

Right or wrong, a little thought taught the lad

that he was helpless. Night was at hand, and it would have been impossible to despatch a message till morning, for the presence of the pirates and the sound of the firing had put every owner of a boat to flight.

Hence it was, then, that the inevitable was cheerfully accepted.

That night darkness soon hid the towering sails of the retreating pirates; and in the morning watch, when Stan left Blunt's side to go to the roof and look out in the gray dawn, glad to breathe the fresh, cool air after some hours in the heated office where he had shared the watch by Blunt's rough couch, there was no sign of danger, scan the distant windings of the river how he would, while sunrise endorsed the fact that the enemy had sailed on all through the night for their rendezvous, scores of miles away.

CHAPTER XXXII.

'SHOT SILK.'

IT was the next evening when, after a whole day's rest passed in a deep sleep quite free from fever—as Stan was made to notice by Wing the Chinaman, who drew his attention to the calmness of the sleep, the absence of all fever and restlessness, and, above all, the soft, fine perspiration which bedewed the patient's skin—Blunt slowly opened his eyes in the office, now made light and airy by the removal of the barricades, and lay looking up at the ceiling.

As Wing pointed out the fact to Stan, the movement he made startled the sufferer, who looked at him sideways and said:

'What's the matter? Where am I?'

Stan bent over him and replied.

'To be sure. Yes; I remember now. Ah, how weak I am! But tell me, Lynn; how are things going?'

Stan explained the position briefly.

'Good!' said Blunt. 'Excellent! Thoroughly thrashed them?'

'For the present; but we all believe that they'll come back.'

'No, no, Lynn,' replied Blunt faintly; 'not for

long enough, if they ever do. Tell me again; how many did they lose?'

'Ought you to talk now?'

'Well, no, I suppose not much; but I'm all right, only very weak. I'm not going to die, my lad. There! I will not talk much. Go on telling me. I must hear.'

Stan told him, but made no allusion to the bit of treachery; and when he had ended the manager smiled his approval.

'Just what I expected,' he said. 'Brave lads, all of them.'

Hearing the talking, Stan's lieutenant in the defence came softly in, but not so quietly as to be unheard by the wounded man, who raised his hand on the uninjured side.

'Ah, Lawrence!' he said. 'I've heard all about it. Bravely done, all of you. I'm better, you see. All that feverish muddle I felt in the head is gone.'

'That's right, sir. I came in to see how you were.'

'Couldn't be going on better.'

'But what about sending down to Nang Ti for a native doctor?'

'What for?'

'To attend you, sir.'

'Pooh! Absurd! Wing can do anything that a native doctor would suggest. He knows as much as I do, and I know by my symptoms that I'm going on all right.'

'But we thought that as soon as you came to it might be better to send for help.'

'No need, my man. I must be kept a bit low

and quiet, not worried nor allowed to get up too soon, and I shall soon be as well as ever. Now tell me quietly, what have you done about our breast-works and the wall?'

'Nothing, sir.'

'What! not got the boxes and bales under cover again?'

'We thought it better to leave things as they were in case the enemy returned.'

'Bah! They will not come. But look here; the ammunition must be getting very low.'

'Very, sir,' said Lawrence, with a meaning look at Stan.

'To be sure.—Here, Lynn, first thing to-morrow morning write a despatch to your father, telling him of the attack and asking for a fresh supply of car-tridges. It must be sent off by Wing in the first boat you can get hold of. At Nang Ti he will soon find a steamer bound for Hai-Hai.—You, Lawrence, start the first thing in the morning all hands at work to restore everything that is not damaged.'

'Yes, sir.'

'That will do. I must not talk any more. Good-night.'

To Stan's surprise, the patient had no sooner closed his eyes than he seemed to be asleep; and it was late morning, just as Stan's long letter was finished, and Wing, who declared himself well enough, came in to announce that he had picked up a boat from among those which had come stealing back, when Blunt opened his eyes again.

Busy days followed, with confidence returning as no further news was heard of the pirates, while the

way in which the people of the nearest villages came back to their homes and work in the fields seemed to act as an endorsement of the idea that the terrible raid was over, and the likelihood of there being another attack seemed to be past.

The men worked hard; the traces of the fiery trial disappeared from the great storehouse, save that the charring and the pitch-stains refused to be scraped out; barricades disappeared, and partitions and stacks of chests and bales rose again in their old places; the carpenters cut out damaged wood, and with the exception of new-looking patches the place assumed its former aspect, while the business in the office and counting-house went on again as if the whole ugly bloodshedding had been only a feverish dream.

Wing had not yet returned, but one afternoon Stan was busy in the office talking to Blunt about a boat-load of tea which had come down from the interior —for the manager had progressed so rapidly that he was well on the high-road to complete recovery. Naturally he was a good deal pulled down, hollow of cheek and sunken of eye, and compelled to assist his steps by means of a stout bamboo cane, while the arm nearest to the injury was supported by a silken scarf used as a sling. But he was bright and cheerful, and busy in the office some hours every day, working, as he called it, vicariously, Stan being his deputy, who superintended a great deal of the correspondence that went on.

'No news yet of Wing,' he was saying. 'Seems a very long time, Lynn.'

'Oh no; it 's a long way, and there might be some delay over getting the supplies you want.'

'S'pose so,' said Blunt abruptly. 'Good job our piratical friends don't know of it or they'd come down at once. Hullo! What's that?'

Lawrence rose and went to the window to see what was the meaning of a loud gabble of voices coming from the wharf.

'It's a boat coming in,' he said.

'Oh, Wing at last!' said Blunt. 'Well, I'm very glad. A good supply of ammunition is just the tonic that will pull me round.'

'It may be, sir, but I hardly think so,' replied Lawrence. 'It's the *Chee-ho* come back.'

'With that miserable sneak Mao. Cowardly hound to slip off as he did. Here, I'll have a talk with him when he comes ashore. No more boatloads for him, he'll find.—What say, Lynn? I'm weak yet—not get in a passion?'

'It wouldn't be wise,' whispered Stan.

'Well, perhaps not; but the thought of that fat, smooth, comfortable-looking poodle coming in here smiling and rubbing his hands puts me in a perspiration.'

'Perhaps he'll be ashamed to show himself.'

'What!' cried Blunt. 'Mao ashamed? You don't know him. You see if he doesn't come cringing in, just as if nothing had happened, to ask if there is a load ready for him to take down to the port.—What do you say, Lawrence?'

'The same as you do, sir.'

Half-an-hour later the matter discussed was put to the proof, for there was the soft, shuffling sound of a Chinaman's boots in the passage, and the *tindal* of the boat in which Stan had arrived with Wing gave

a gentle tap, pushed the door, and entered, smiling profusely and bowing to Blunt and Stan, before taking up his post half-way to the desks, hat in hand, waiting to be addressed.

Blunt heard him, but paid no heed for a minute or so; then looking up sternly, he saluted the man with a deep-toned—

'Well, sir, what do you want?'

'Come see when load leady fo' *Chee-ho* boat.'

'How dare you come and ask after deserting us as you did? Why, we might have been all massacred, you cowardly scoundrel, for all you'd have done to save us. What have you got to say for yourself?'

'Me t'ink *Chee-ho* b'long me. If stop, pilate man flow 'tink-pot. Set fi' and cuttee Mao float,' said the man deprecatingly.

'And so you set sail and got out of the way?'

'Yes. Velly fast. *Chee-ho* nicee big boat b'long me. Takee ca'e. Hold plenty tea-box, plenty silk. Bluntee want'——

'Look here, you scoundrel,' cried the manager angrily; 'I am Mr Blunt, your employer, and if you call me Bluntee again I'll throw this ruler at you.'

As he spoke the manager caught his big ruler from the desk and made so fierce an 'offer' with it that the Chinese boat-captain dropped upon his knees and bowed his head almost to the floor.

'Get up!' shouted the manager.

'No flow t'ick stick?' whined the man.

'I will if you don't get up this moment. Stand up like a man.'

'Oh deah!' said the shivering Chinaman, getting up slowly and painfully, and displaying a couple of

great tears running down his fat cheeks. 'Misteh Blunt wantee Mao stop havee float cut?'

'No, but to stay and help us, sir. How did you know but what we might want to escape in your boat down to Nang Ti?'

'Mao quite suah not do so. Know Misteh Blunt big man. Velly angly. Can'tee flighten um and makee lun away. Mao know he stop fightee.'

'And so you sailed away and left us in the lurch.'

'Yes. Pilate man velly dleadful. Killee evelybody and cut Mao head off. Cut all men and flow um ove'boa'd.'

'And so you ran away—eh?'

'Yes. Velly much aflaid. Mao tly save boatee fo' Misteh Blunt. Boat b'long Mao.'

'Ah, well! you saved it.'

'Yes. Tookee long way. Sail up cleek. Hide till Mao quitee suah pilate junk allee gone 'way. Then come again. You got plenty bale plenty tea-box fo' Mao take down livah—eh?'

'Be off!' said Blunt shortly. 'I'll think about it.'

'Yes, Misteh Blunt t'ink gleat deal. See Mao 'blige lun away. *Chee-ho* boat b'long Mao. No do let pilate buln, sink. B'long Mao—b'long Misteh Blunt—b'long evelybody.'

'Be off!' shouted Blunt; and the man went away, nodding and smiling, to join his crew upon the wharf.

'Shall you employ him any more?' said Stan as the door closed and the captain's blue frock was seen to balloon out in the pleasant breeze as he marched complacently along the river-front.

'Oh yes,' replied Blunt. 'He's a very honest fellow, and can't help being a thorough coward.

Suppose I dismiss him, I shall have to engage another, who would possibly turn out dishonest and a greater humbug than this one.'

'But he seems to be utterly without courage.'

'Pooh! We all are at first. I was horribly frightened when we were attacked.'

'It didn't seem like it,' said Stan, smiling.

'Oh no, of course not. I wasn't going to let any one see what a stew I was in. That's the result of education and one's love of keeping up appearances. You owned to being frightened too—at first.'

'I was,' said Stan frankly. 'Enough to make one.'

'Of course it was. But, you see, we're Britons, and when a job of this sort comes to a head, why, we say, "Well, it's no use to make any bones about it; the thing has to be done;" and we do it as well as we can. And, as you see, the job was done.'

'Only half-done,' said Stan, with a sigh.

'What! I think it was splendidly well done. What do you mean by your "half-done"?'

'Why, you said the enemy would come back again.'

'Ye—es; so I did; but I don't feel so sure now.'

'How is that?' asked Stan, impressed by his companion's manner.

'Well, you see, one often judges how the weather is going to be by the behaviour of the animals about one. Birds, cattle, reptiles, insects, fish, if one studies them, give one hints of what sort of a season one is going to have. Chinese, too, are not slow in that way. You see Mao has come back.'

'Yes; but what has that to do with it?'

'A good deal. He has a sort of instinctive as well

as experienced knowledge that the trouble is at an end, or else he wouldn't have shown his nose here now. I shouldn't wonder if he had a hint that the enemy were coming, some time before they arrived.'

'But if he had he would have warned you.'

'So he did, in a quiet sort of way, but I didn't believe him. Yes, I begin to think that you gave the enemy such an awful thrashing'——

'I?' cried Stan. 'Why, I only carried out your orders.'

'And well, too, my lad; and as I was about to say when you interrupted me so rudely, you gave them such an awful thrashing that in the future they will look out for some nut to crack that has a thinner shell and leave us most carefully alone. Mao has come back, and that means the storm is well over.'

'But you 'll be well prepared in case they do come again?'

'Trust me, my lad. You and I will begin to play chess of an evening in future.'

'Have you a set of chess-men?'

'No; nor do I want them. We 'll make the *hong* our chess-board, and play the game of defiance with our brains.'

'I have some idea of what you mean,' said Stan, laughing, 'but it is not quite clear.'

'I mean, we 'll set to and scheme how to meet our friends if they do come again. You see, one is sure to have warning. They can't come down the river without; and I can't help thinking that you and I ought to be able to contrive some kind of floating dodge which we could let down amongst the junks, and which would blow them up or set fire to them.'

'Yes; I see,' cried Stan eagerly. 'Or why not try something with a big kite that we could drop down to explode on their decks. But of course I don't know how.'

'There you are!' cried Blunt, clapping him on the back. 'Bravo! The very thing!'

'Oh no,' said Stan quickly. 'That was just the ghost of an idea.'

'True; but we'll set to and make it something solid. The people here have wonderful kites, and I'll be bound to say that you and I could contrive something chemical that we could send up and manage with a string till it was just over them, and then drop it where it would explode, so that it would scare them off even if it did not set fire to their junks. But wait a bit. We'll see.'

'Yes; if you take it like that, I think we might contrive something. I say, why not some kind of torpedo that we could sink just off the wharf, connect it here with a wire, and have an electric battery to fire the charge? Why, if I had had such a thing here when the junks were all together off the place, I could have'——

'Blown them to smithereens, my lad,' cried Blunt. 'Bravo! And we'll have a little gun, too, that we can work easily—one that will send explosive shells. There! that will do. I'm going to fill up an order for one battery of cells, thirteen as twelve torpedoes, so many yards of insulated wire, and—— Here, I say, we ought out of common humanity to send word up the river to all pirates to make their wills before they come for their next attack.'

'Or put up a big hoarding with a notice written in

Chinese for all who come up and down the river to read.'

'What about?'

'New patent steel traps and spring-guns are set in these grounds,' said Stan, laughing.

'All right, my lad. Joke away; but I'm on my mettle, and if we can't contrive something better than walls and barricades of tea-chests and silk it's very strange.'

'Well, we ought to, certainly.'

'And we will. Just think of what a lot of good stuff has been made absolutely worthless. There is, I should say, a couple or three hundred pounds' worth of tea and silk—more perhaps—perfectly unsaleable.'

'Couldn't you send it to market under another name?' said Stan, laughing.

'Name? What name?' growled Blunt contemptuously. 'You can't sell tea that has been exposed to fire. What would you call it—coffee?'

'No; gunpowder tea,' cried Stan merrily.

'One to you,' said Blunt, with a grim laugh. 'But what about your silk?'

'Oh, that's easy!' said Stan. 'Call that shot silk.'

'Good gracious!' cried Blunt, with mock solemnity. 'The poor fellow is going wrong. Overstrain, I suppose, from the excitement of the fight. There! try and be calm. It's a bad sign when a fellow begins to make feeble jokes. Don't try again, Lynn. Keep on with some nice, light, playful idea or two, such as the flying kites and contriving busters for the Chinese junks. Those would be gentle, innocent pursuits. But seriously, though, the more I think

of what you say the more I am taken by it. You see, it would be quite new and startling for the enemy. Those junks are as fragile as can be, and a very little would send them to the bottom. Here, I say, I think I have it. Isn't there a chemical that we could squirt over them from an engine of some kind?'

'What for?'

'To burn them. I once saw a chemical experiment in which such stuff was thrown on to some light wood, and it burst into flame at once. That's the stuff we want. If we can set one junk on fire, it will set more in the same condition. What do you say to that?'

'Splendid, if it could be done.'

'Could be done? It must be done, and we're going to do it. Oh, there are more ways of killing a cat than hanging it. Let the pigtails come. They shall find that I'm not going to have any more of our chests and bales spoiled. I think'——

'So do I,' said Stan firmly—'that you've been talking twice as much as you ought to do; so now have a rest.'

'Well, I am a bit husky,' said Blunt, 'but not like the same man to-day. Humph! Perhaps you are right.'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

'WING'S A—CHINAMAN.'

SEVERAL anxious days were passed, during which a sharp lookout was kept for the return of Wing with the ammunition; but still it did not come, and, as Blunt reasonably said, they could not settle down comfortably to invention and forms of defence by schemes until they could feel prepared temporarily for an emergency.

'Once we have two or three cases of cartridges in hand we'll go to work at our plans. But this waiting takes it out of a man.'

'It is giving you time to get a little stronger,' replied Stan.

'Oh, bother that! I could grow stronger fast enough if my mind were quite at rest. I'm beginning to think that poor old Wing has come to grief, and if he doesn't reach here by to-morrow night I shall make up a little cargo and send Mao with an urgent despatch to the principals. It's growing serious. Here, come and let us plan what to send.'

'You had better rest patiently,' said Stan.

'Who's to rest patiently with not a dozen rifle-cartridges on the premises?'

'You,' said Stan, smiling.

'What! Do you know the enemy may even now be on their way to make a fresh attack?'

'No, they mayn't,' replied Stan.

'What! How do you know?'

'By seeing your weather-glass point to fine weather.'

'My weather-glass?'

'Yes—old Mao. He seems to be as satisfied as possible, sitting smoking his opium-pipe and watching his men caulk and varnish the *Chee-ho*.'

'Well, he does look pretty well content; but it's weary work waiting, and I feel convinced that the message has never reached the principals.'

'I can see a proof,' cried Stan excitedly, 'that you are only looking on the black side of things.'

'What do you mean?' said Blunt, staring at the way in which the lad had sprung to his feet to run to the open window looking down the river.

'Here's the boat in sight, sir,' cried Lawrence, hurriedly opening the door.

'What! our boat?' cried Blunt excitedly.

'Yes, sir, with Wing showing his signal. Try the glass, sir.'

Blunt snatched the glass offered to him, but before he could get to the window and focus it with his trembling hands, Stan had taken down his own binocular and was leaning out, bringing the matting-sailed boat close into the room, as it were.

'Yes,' he cried, 'there's Wing holding up a little flag so that it blows straight out.'

'A pocket-handkerchief Union-jack?' cried Blunt.

'Yes, that's it; and there's some one else on board beside the boatmen. Why—yes—no—yes—

no.—Oh, do stand still, whoever you are! I can't see if you bob about so.—Yes, it is. Look, Mr Blunt—look! Here 's Uncle Jeff come so as to see everything for himself.'

'Right, Lynn, right,' cried the manager; 'so it is. Three cheers for him. We 'll give them when he 's close up. Well, hurrah for one thing! We 're not going to show him the ashes of his big warehouse along with our burnt bodies.'

'Ugh!' cried Stan. 'What a gruesome idea! Let 's get out and have the flag hoisted on the pole.'

'Ah! and we 'll have every one out too, so as to give him a warm welcome. But are you quite sure it is your uncle?'

'Certain,' cried Stan proudly. 'You never saw anybody but Uncle Jeff standing up in that free-and-easy way, just as if he didn't care a snap of the fingers for the whole world.'

'Yes, that 's Mr Jeffrey,' said Blunt, lowering his glass and drawing in a deep breath; 'the very sight of him seems to do a man a power of good. Out with you, Lynn, and send Lawrence to hail the boys. We 'll all turn out and man the edge of the wharf. I want your uncle to see that I haven't lost a man.'

A few minutes later clerks, warehousemen, and coolies were all standing at the edge of the wharf, with the flag fluttering and straining from the halyards, where it had been run up to the head of the signal-pole; while as soon as the boat came within hailing distance Lawrence acted as fugleman and headed three good, hearty, welcoming cheers. These, in spite of the admixture of Chinese squeak from the

throats of the coolies—a squeak which ended with a hoarse croak—sounded so pleasant to Uncle Jeff's anxious ears that he whisked off his sun-helmet, tossed it on high, and gave forth a thoroughly deep, hearty British hurrah, while, not to be outdone, Wing, who stood behind, bared his pigtailed head to wave his lacquered, shining black hat, and echoed the shout with his alto pipe.

In another minute the sail was being lowered, and the next, as the boat glided up against the wharf, Stan sprang on board, to have his hands grasped by his big, manly relative.

'Why, Stan, boy,' he cried, 'we never thought we were going to send you out of the Hai-Hai frying-pan into the Nang Ti fire. But you were not burnt?'

He held the lad back at arm's-length and uttered a loud puff like a whale getting rid of its confined breath.

'No, I can see you were not. Eyes bright, colour fresh, and hearty as can be. Hah! that 's a comfort. We shouldn't have sent you if we had known. —Here, Blunt,' he continued, 'do you call this management, bringing down all the ruffians of the river to attack the place! Why, hang it, man! you do look as if you have had more than your share of trouble. You 've lost pounds since I saw you last. Coming round again, though, I can see.'

'Yes; there 's nothing much wrong now,' was the reply as the pair shook hands heartily. 'The wound 's healing up nicely, thanks to Wing here.—Well, Wing, how are you?'

'Badly,' was the reply. 'Been fletting.'

'Fretting? What about?'

'Misteh Blunt and young Lynn. S'posee pilate come back and Wing not bling ca'tlidge.'

'But you've brought them now?' said Blunt eagerly.

'Yes, plenty big box full. Bling Misteh Jeffley too. All leady fightee when pilate come.'

'And a very welcome recruit if needed,' said Blunt, smiling. 'But we don't want any more of that work—at any rate till I get strong again.—You've heard, Mr Lynn, how I caved in and left your nephew to fight the battle?'

'Oh yes. I've heard all about it from Wing,' said Uncle Jeff dryly. 'I gave him a lesson in the use of the revolver before he left home, but I didn't know he was going to turn out such an awful fire-eater as he has.'

'Don't you think you had better come in and have something to eat, uncle?' said Stan quietly. 'It will do you more good than making fun of me.'

'Fun, Stan, my lad? Oh! I don't call this fun. Wing says you've become quite a general.'

'Wing's a—Chinaman,' said Stan, with a laugh full of annoyance, which made the two men exchange glances—looks which the lad interpreted to mean, 'Hadn't we better leave off?'

And in this spirit Uncle Jeff clapped his hand upon the boy's shoulder and said heartily:

'Take me round and show me the damage done by the enemy, my boy.'

'There's very little to see, uncle, but the chipped stone and the leaden bullets and pieces of iron the enemy poured in.'

'The bullets—eh? What! in the stone?'

'No, no, uncle,' cried the lad. 'Stuck in the door-posts and woodwork.'

'What about the windows where the stink-pots came flying in as if all the stars in the sky had broken loose?'

'Oh, they must have been flying across the office, uncle, when Wing was nursing Mr Blunt. We didn't see those upstairs.'

'But a great many did come in?'

'Yes, uncle, and burned great patches in the floor.'

'Come, that 's something; you must take me up and show me.'

'I can't show you much, uncle,' was the reply, 'for the bales have been stacked in their places again.'

'Oh, come! this is disappointing,' cried Uncle Jeff. 'No ruins; no wounds but Mr Blunt's; no burnt-out warehouses! Why, after such a scare I expected to find the whole place crippled. Where 's Wing?'

'Oh, I must have a word here,' said Blunt. 'I dare say Master Wing painted the affair up pretty well, but it was as bad as it could be.'

'Why, I thought you were bowled out at the first ball,' said Uncle Jeff sharply.

'So I was; but the other players had their innings, and told me all about it afterwards. Old Lawrence says it was awful.'

'So it was, uncle,' cried Stan; 'nothing could have been worse.'

'Well, all I can say is,' said Uncle Jeff some time later, 'that you have cleared away wonderfully.

But there 's one thing I don't like. It sticks in my memory very tightly, and it seems to me that it is the one weak spot in our armour if we are again attacked.'

'And what 's that, uncle?' asked Stan, for there was a pause.

'The traitor in the camp, my lad. You can't go on like this. What is the use of making all kinds of preparations when there is an enemy in the midst who is ready to spoil all and, as it were, sell you to the enemy?'

'You mean about the water poured over the ammunition?' said Blunt, speaking rather excitedly.

'Yes—of course. Now whom do you suspect?'

'At first I thought Wing might be the guilty party.'

'Wing!' cried Uncle Jeff, starting. 'Ah, to be sure!' he continued after but a few moments' thought. 'He was my informant, and very eager to tell me all about it. Tried hard, I remember now, to make me understand it must have been some one at the *hong*. Here, Stan, it 's a long time since I was at school; you 've only just come away. What 's that French proverb about the man who tries to clear himself making matters worse?'

'He who excuses himself accuses himself,' said Stan promptly.

'Humph! Yes. But it sounds better in French. Here, I don't like to think old Wing guilty; he has been such a true and faithful servant to the "foreign devils," as they call us. Besides, he is so much one of us, and has been so well paid and treated. You 've had no quarrel with him, Blunt?'

'Not the slightest. Always the best of friends. Of course, you know my way—short, sharp, and decisive.'

'Yes; you always were a bit of a bully, Blunt.'

'But I 'm always just, sir.'

'Perfectly; and I believe the people like you at bottom, even if you have a rough side to your tongue.'

'Oh yes, uncle,' put in Stan eagerly, to be rewarded by a grateful glance. 'I 'm sure there isn't a man here who wouldn't fight to the death for Mr Blunt.'

'I wouldn't go so far as that, Lynn,' said Blunt, with the hot blood colouring his pallid, sunken cheeks.

'But they 've proved it,' cried Stan energetically.

'I 'm thinking it was more for you, Lynn,' said Blunt quietly.

'Well, let that rest,' cried Uncle Jeff; 'and let 's go on with the trial of Master Wing. You have been good friends with him, Blunt?'

'Excellent.'

'No sudden quarrel?'

'Oh no.'

'Given him no cause of offence? These Asiatics are rather fond of nursing up a bit of revenge.'

'Oh no,' repeated Blunt.

'What about the coolies, then? Any knocking down or punishing any of them?'

'Nothing of the kind, sir. I am quite at a loss to think of anything that could have prompted a Chinaman here to retaliate.—You can think of nothing, can you, Lynn, in the short time you have been here?'

Lynn remained silent and looked very conscious, while Uncle Jeff watched him sideways.

'Hah!' he said at last. 'Dumb. Now, Stan, lad, what are you thinking of? Out with it.'

The lad tried to clear his throat, but in vain, for his voice sounded husky as he said:

'I was thinking about Wing being on the watch, uncle—about my shooting at him, Mr Blunt, and his tumble.'

'Puss! puss! puss! puss! puss!' said Uncle Jeff softly, and he looked towards the door.

It was the turn of Stan and the manager to stare at him now, and they looked as if they fancied he was going out of his mind.

But he looked back at them with a light that was certainly not that of insanity dancing in his clear, keen eyes, and there was the faint dawning of a smile upon his lips as he saw their puzzled looks.

'What are you staring at, Stan?' he said at last.

'I—I couldn't make out what you meant, uncle. Do you want the cat? She 's generally in the warehouse, watching for the rats that come out of the river-bank.'

'Oh no; I wasn't alluding to that one, but to the other.'

'There is no other cat on the premises, sir,' said Blunt, staring in turn.

'Oh yes, there is. I mean the metaphorical cat. She 's out of the bag now, and I was calling her back. Why, hang it, man! there 's the cause of the plot. Tell us all about it.'

The incident was repeated to the end.

'A great pity,' said Uncle Jeff gravely.

'Yes, sir, it was,' said Blunt. 'I acted on the impulse of the moment, and of course I alone was to blame, for in my sharp, overbearing manner I insisted upon your nephew firing. Of course, I only meant, in my annoyance at his dozing off at such a time, to give him a startler. But I 've felt sorry ever since.'

'I am sorry too,' said Uncle Jeff.

'And I too, uncle.'

'You are, I know, Stan. Well, it 's of no use to cry over spilt milk. The thing 's done and can't be undone. But there 's the motive, and now the poor weak fellow has gratified his revengeful bit of spite let us hope he is satisfied and that all will go smoothly. Still, it is a painful thought that we have had a traitor in the camp.'

'I don't care,' said Stan firmly.

'It is of no use to care, my lad; but if we have the enemy back I should certainly lock Master Wing where he could do no mischief.'

'You misunderstand me, uncle,' said Stan. 'I didn't finish what I meant to say.'

'Let 's have it, then, boy.'

'I meant to say, I don't care; I don't believe Wing would do such a thing.'

'Neither do I,' said Blunt warmly. 'The poor fellow is too true. He was quite affectionate to me in attending to my wounds, and nothing could have been better than the plucky way in which he ran all risks through the fight, and afterwards undertook the commission to go and fetch the cartridges. No; I say Wing was not the guilty party.'

'Well,' said Uncle Jeff, 'I want to be with you,

for I like old Wing. There's a something about him that puts me in mind of a faithful dog. We'll agree that it was not he, and that drives us to suspect the coolies.'

'Yes,' said Blunt; 'and I don't like suspecting them, for a better set of fellows never lived.'

'There couldn't be,' said Stan. 'They almost worship Mr Blunt, uncle.'

'Hah!' said the latter. 'It's a puzzle, then, and I can't help thinking that the best way will be to drop the matter and be watchful. If we begin investigating we may not find out the guilty, but we're bound to upset the innocent by our suspicions. I say, Blunt, I wouldn't wake up sleeping Chinese again with the rifle.'

'You may depend upon it I shall not, sir,' said Blunt frankly. 'And now, if I may change the subject, I want to be put out of my misery.'

'With a rifle, Blunt?' said Uncle Jeff dryly.

'No, no; not in that way, though I do want it done with cartridges. I shall be in misery till we get those ashore and in the magazine.'

'Quite right; we'll have them seen to at once. We must be ready if the enemy do come.'

'I say, uncle,' cried Stan merrily, 'how you keep on *wei*ng! Any one would think you meant to stop.'

'I do mean to stop, my boy,' said Uncle Jeff sharply.—'No, no, no, no, Blunt; don't take it like that,' he continued as he saw the change in the manager's countenance. 'I have not come to supersede you, only as a humble recruit, ready if wanted, which I fervently hope I shall not be. I should have

brought half-a-dozen good fighting-men with me, only there are none in stock at Hai-Hai. It is getting to be every man for himself, too, and we shall be very unsettled until our Government makes a move and puts a few men-of-war on the station for the protection of the mercantile folk. My brother and several more are bestirring themselves, however, and I hope something will be done before long.'

'But you will take the lead, sir, while you stay, of course,' said Blunt rather coldly. 'As you see, I am weak.'

'I shall do nothing of the kind, Blunt. My brother and I are only too well satisfied with your management. I have come here to help to take care of Nephew Stanley, and when the care is not necessary I am going to have a rest, fishing, botanising, and shooting—in other words, to have a spell of idleness, for I don't think you will be attacked again after the taste you have given the miscreants of our quality here at the *hong*. Now then, Blunt,' he added, 'are you satisfied?'

The manager hesitated and still looked doubtful, but the look that accompanied Uncle Jeff's outstretched hand was sufficient, and he brightened up at once.

'Yes, sir,' he said warmly—'quite.'

CHAPTER XXXIV.

'WAIT TILL THE WRETCHES COME.'

THE landing and stowing away of the cases of ammunition did not last long, for every one joined in it, four men without orders taking charge of a box that one could have carried with ease. In fact, they looked more like a party of schoolboys bringing boxes of fireworks for a fête than stern, energetic men fighting for the privilege of either carrying or simply watching the little chests, the possession of which turned them from helpless, unprotected beings, at the mercy of the next piratical crew that came down the river, to strong, vigorous folk ready for a fleet of junks and eager to fight to any desperate end.

The last case was placed in the little magazine, the trap-door shut down and locked, and then there was a burst of cheering which sounded stifled in the great stack-filled store.

'Why, I thought at one time,' said Uncle Jeff merrily when the whole party had filed out and the speaker was seated in Blunt's private room, 'that they were all going to break out in a triumphal war-dance.'

Stan coloured and laughed.

'Well, uncle,' he said, 'the men were so excited

that I don't see that I, a boy, need mind owning how I felt. It was something like what one used to experience when one had a present years and years ago.'

'What!—ready to jump for joy, Stan?'

'Yes, uncle.'

'I know the feeling,' said Uncle Jeff, chuckling. 'I remember just as well as if it was yesterday. Ready to jump for joy; just, too, when I was so weak from some fever that if I had been out of bed my legs wouldn't have borne me, let alone jumped. I remember it was fine summer weather, and my father had come down from London and brought me a new fishing-rod—a perfect marvel to my young eyes — reddish-yellow bamboo, with brass ferrules, and having one joint fitting beautifully into the other so as to form a walking-stick; and in addition, just as he had brought them and had them bundled up together in a parcel, there was quite a heap of treasures tangled up together on the big sheet of paper spread out upon the white counterpane, while I sat up with two pillows to support my weak back. Oh, it was grand!

'Ha, ha, ha!' chuckled the great stalwart fellow, with his eyes lighting up. 'Didn't I have the window opened so that I could pull joint out from joint and put them together, making the rod grow till I sat holding it out through the drawn-up sash. All the time I was seeing in imagination the great pond sheltered by the willows where the water-lilies grew and the carp and tench sailed about underneath, every now and then lifting a broad dark-green leaf or thrusting a stem aside, with the glistening beetles

gliding about on the surface as if they were playing at engine-turning and describing beautiful geometric figures as the big dragon-flies rustled their gauzy wings and darted here and there in chase of flies.

'Then, too, I remember that I cried out against the window being shut, because three parts of my rod stood out in the open while I was busy examining a hank of Indian twist, beautiful steel-blue hooks of all sizes, from tiny ones on gut to big, quaintly shaped large ones, loose, but with eyes for attachment to the whipcord-like eel-line.'

Uncle Jeff stopped short and turned with a droll look at his nephew.

'Here, Stan,' he said, 'you had better stop me or I shall go on with my rigmarole about that line with the blue-and-white cork float and the other with a quill, besides the one with the sharp-pointed porcupine which stuck through the bedclothes into my leg. Then there was the box of split shot with the lid which stuck, and when I got it off the contents jumped out, to go everywhere, over the bed, into it, under it, rattling between the jug and basin, and had to be hunted out. Then there was that lovely landing-net that was so rarely required for a big fish, but did splendidly to catch butterflies. And the fishing-creel, too, and—— Here, Blunt, my dear fellow, where 's your box of Manilla cigars ?—Stan, get me a light. I must put something in my mouth or I shall begin to tell you both about that little pike that I didn't catch and that big carp that I did—I mean the one that seemed to my boyish eyes as if he wore a suit of armour made of young half-sovereigns overlapping one another from tail to head.

Ah, Stan!' cried Uncle Jeff, 'you're a lucky young dog to be a boy, though you don't know it, and never will till you grow up to be a man.'

'Why, uncle,' cried Stan, 'haven't I just had to play at being a man and handle the rifle?'

'I'm sorry to say yes, my lad, and I'd a great deal rather have heard that you had spent your time wandering on the banks of this splendid river, catching nothing, perhaps, but filling your young mind with things to remember when you grow old. Ah! life's a very lovely thing if human beings would not spoil it as they do.'

Stan smiled at his uncle's words, but he did not see life in the same light after his experiences at Hai-Hai and at the *hong;* though he was quite ready to agree as to the way in which men spoil the world, and he did say this, very tersely, later on:

'Especially Chinese pirates, uncle.'

'Just so, my boy. But really it is all so beautiful here,' said Uncle Jeff, 'that now I have been refreshed and feel rested, it is more than ever hard to believe what a desperate fight you have had. I wish I had been here.'

'So do I, uncle,' said Stan merrily; but he turned serious the next moment. 'No, I do not, uncle. It was very horrible, and you might have been shot.'

'Oh, I don't know, Stan. You and your men escaped pretty well. However, matters were best as they were—eh, Blunt?'

'Certainly,' said the manager. 'The defence could not have been in better hands.'

'Oh, don't!' cried Stan, speaking like a pettish girl. 'Now you are both sneering at me.'

This was of course denied, but the lad was only half-convinced, and too glad to hear the conversation take a different turn.

'We must achieve some better means of defence, Blunt,' said Uncle Jeff. 'You ought to have a good little piece of artillery here—something that would tell well on a junk—sink her if it was necessary.'

'That 's what we were planning, uncle,' cried Stan; 'only we had some rather peculiar notions.'

The natural result of this remark was that the lad had to explain and give a full account of his ideas, which was received with a grunt.

'There 's a lot in it that sounds well, Stan,' said Uncle Jeff after listening for some time in silence, 'but too much of the toy-shop and Fifth of November about the rest. That kite-flying would never do.'

'Why, it would be so simple, uncle!'

'Very simple indeed, my boy—Simple Simony. Why, Stan, how do you think you are going to fly kites with the enemy in front?'

'But they 're only to raise burning things like the pirates' stink-pots.'

'I should have a deal more faith in something of that sort. But how would you guide your kite with a fiery tail over the junk you meant to destroy?'

'By means of the string. I could easily manage one, by pulling in and letting out till it was just over a junk; and then I should pull the second string, for of course there would be two; and then I should let one go, and down would fall the fiery shell right upon the junk's deck.'

'If it didn't go down splash into the river—eh?'

'Oh, I should manage it better than that,' said the lad confidently.

'So I suppose,' said Uncle Jeff sarcastically; 'and of course the wind would be setting in the right direction—that is to say, straight from you and over the enemy's junks.'

'Of course, uncle,' said Stan confidently.

'Of course! Why, you too sanguine young enthusiast, the chances would be five-and-twenty to one that the wind would not be right on the day the enemy came. Won't do, Stan. Try again.'

'Oh, I can't if you go on like that, uncle,' said the lad in an aggrieved tone. 'You're not half such a good listener as Mr Blunt. He thinks a good deal of my ideas.'

'Then it was quite time I came. He'd spoil you. I will not, you may depend. Now then, let's have a better idea than that.'

'Well, uncle,' said the boy rather grumpily, 'I did think something of having a boat always moored among the reeds—one filled with dangerous combustibles—that I could steal up to after the junks had stopped to kill and plunder us, apply a match, and, after lashing the rudder, cause it to float down with the stream right amongst the junks and set them on fire.'

'Splendid idea!' cried Uncle Jeff, clapping his hands.

'You like that, then?' said Stan, brightening up.

'I think the idea would be glorious. Deadly in the extreme to the enemy, but'——

'Oh uncle! don't say *but*,' cried the lad, growing crestfallen again.

'Very well, my boy; I will not if you do not wish it. All the same, however, there 's a defect in it that would be fatal.'

'What 's that?' said the boy rather dismally.

'The Chinese are very weak-minded, but they're not idiots.'

'No—of course not; but tell me what you mean.'

'Pooh! Can't you see for yourself? The enemy would see that the fire-boat was coming, and of course they'd either heave anchor or cast their cables and slip away, if they didn't send your fire-boat to the bottom with a shot from one of their swivel-guns. Try again.'

'Oh, it 's of no use to try, uncle.'

'Yes, it is. You've got gumption enough to make a pot without a hole in the bottom. You're last idea is manageable; the kite-flying was not. Now then, you've got a better idea than that up your sleeve or in that noddle of yours, I'm sure.—Hasn't he, Blunt?'

'Yes—a far better one.'

'I thought so.—Now then, boy, let 's have it.'

Stan stood looking gloomy and silent.

'Well, why don't you go on?' said Uncle Jeff.

'Because I feel as if you are laughing at me for trying to invent something.'

'I am not, Stan—honour bright!' cried Uncle Jeff. 'But even if I was laughing, what right have you to kick against it? Every inventor gets laughed at if he brings out something new, and then stupid people who grinned because they had never seen anything like it before are the first to praise. There!

out with it, Stan; the third shot must be a good one.'

The gloom passed off the lad's countenance, and he laid bare his idea of contriving a kind of torpedo to sink off the wharf and connect by means of a wire with an electric battery in the office, ready for firing as soon as one of the junks was well over it.

'Ah! that sounds better,' cried Uncle Jeff eagerly; 'but could it be done?'

'Oh yes,' said Blunt. 'I think the idea is capital.'

'So do I,' said Uncle Jeff; 'but there's an old proverb about the engineer being hoist with his own petard, and however willing I might be to blow up a junk full of murderous pirates, I shouldn't like to go up with them.'

'Oh, that would be easy enough, uncle,' said Stan. 'We should have to fill a big, perfectly waterproof canister with powder or some other combustible, make a hole in the side or top, and pass a copper wire through so that it is right in the powder, then solder up the hole, and after the canister has been sunk, bring the wire ashore ready.'

'Yes, and what then? I must confess that I know nothing about electricity.'

'I'll tell you,' said Stan. 'You fetch the copper wire ashore and bring it in, say, through that window. There! like this piece of string,' continued the lad, illustrating his plans with a string-box which he took from the office table, and after drawing out a sufficiency of the twine, he dropped the string-box outside the window. 'Now, uncle,' he said, 'that thing represents the canister of blasting-powder, and the string is the wire. You see, I shut down the

window to hold the wire fast, and bring the end here on to the office table.'

'I see,' said Uncle Jeff; 'but what next?'

'I'll show you directly,' continued Stan, with his forehead puckered up in lines as if it were a mental Clapham Junction. 'Now then, this stationery-case is my battery of cells, each charged with acid and stuff.'

'We don't want to put a dangerous battery on Mr Blunt's table to blow him up,' said Uncle Jeff. 'He's too useful.'

'Of course he is, uncle; but we couldn't blow him up, because the battery isn't dangerous.'

'Then what's the good of it?'

'Ah! you don't see yet; you will directly,' cried the boy. 'There's no danger at all till it is connected with the wire; and the wire, you know, is connected with the canister of explosive, uncle. And don't you see that it will be sunk right away there off the wharf? When we connect the wire with the battery, it is not that which goes off, but the powder in the canister under the junk.'

'Oh, I see!' said Uncle Jeff. 'Good; but when it is connected what does it do?'

'Sends a current of electricity along the wire.'

'Of course; I do understand that. Sends an electric spark through the powder and blows it up.'

'That's right, uncle; only, instead of sending a spark along the wire, it sends a current to the end of the wire, and that end begins to glow till it turns white-hot. But long before that it has set the powder off, and if all goes right we should have a great junk blown all to pieces.'

'Bravo!' cried Uncle Jeff. 'Three cheers for our inventor, Blunt!'

'Nonsense, uncle! I didn't invent that. It's only what one has read in books on electricity. Now you can see, of course, that there is no danger at the battery end of the wire.'

'If you tell me there is no danger, Stan, of course I am bound to believe it; but I don't quite see why the wire should not carry us the message of the blow-up, and blow us up into the bargain.'

'Ah! but that would be outside the bargain, uncle,' said Stan, laughing. 'It would be a good bargain for us.'

'And a horribly bad one for the Chinamen,' said Uncle Jeff.—'Look here, Blunt, this seems to be quite feasible.'

'Quite,' was the reply. 'There is only one risk in it that I see.'

'And that is'——

'Making a mistake: some one connecting the wire at the wrong time for the friendly junk instead of an enemy. It wouldn't do to blow up Mao or old Wing.'

'No, uncle,' said Stan quietly; 'and it wouldn't do to take down rifles and shoot either of them. There would be no danger so long as we took care of the electric battery; nothing else would fire the canister.'

'All right,' cried Uncle Jeff in his cheeriest way. 'Then the next thing to be done is to get so many tins.'

'They ought to be copper,' said Stan.

'Very well, then, coppers—ready to "sky," Stan

—eh? You remember skying the copper—the old charwoman putting the gunpowder in the copper flue, as she said, to "burn up by degrees"?'

'Yes, I remember,' said Stan, laughing; 'and when it had exploded she said, "Where is the powder blue?"'

'Exactly. The result of meddling with explosives which she did not understand. I don't understand these things, so I feel nervous about handling them; but with the proviso that you two are careful, I shall send an order for all the materials you want, so that we shall have so many mines ready for war-junks which come to meddle with us. But it must take time.'

'Yes,' said Blunt, 'it will take some months, for everything will have to come from England, I expect. But I honestly believe that it will be long before the enemy get over the defeat they have had, and meanwhile I feel quite happy, for you have brought me four times as large a supply of cartridges as we had before, and yourself as reinforcement. Besides, our men are all veterans now, ready for the savage brutes if they do venture to come.'

'Well, the longer they keep off the better,' said Uncle Jeff, 'for you will not be out of hospital for a month, Blunt.'

'What!' cried the manager fiercely. 'Let them come, and they'd find me ready for action now.'

Uncle Jeff glanced at him and shook his head.

'But I am, I tell you,' cried Blunt excitedly. 'My eyes are clear, and my hand is pretty steady. I could manage a rifle now as well as when I practised

at a mark.—What do you say, Stan? Don't you think I could fight?'

'I believe you 'd try.'

'Try: yes. I want to pay off old scores.'

'Ah, well!' said Uncle Jeff, 'we have no need to fidget about that. Wait till the wretches come and then we 'll see.'

CHAPTER XXXV.

'QUITE SAFE TILL DAWN.'

'IT seems rather absurd for us to settle down to talk about making what people call infernal machines, Stan,' said Uncle Jeff, and he pointed through the open window of the office to the scene being enacted on the wharf, with a lovely background of river, cultivated ground covered with corn, rice, and fruit-trees, and beyond these hill and mountain of every shade of delicious blue. 'Why, everything looks as peaceful as can be. Look at those trading-craft with the stores they are bringing in, and the village boats piled up with fruit, vegetables, and grain. Hullo! What 's that next one?'

'Oh, that 's the one that brings milk and eggs, poultry and little pigs,' said Stan, smiling. 'We call it the *Dairy*.'

'I really cannot realise the horrors you talked about, Stan, and in the midst of such a beautiful scene of peace and content I can't talk about torpedoes. Here, I want some of those bright golden bananas from that boat.'

Stan's forehead puckered up again, and he did not even glance at the boat with golden bananas, oranges, and scarlet tomatoes.

'But you wouldn't say it was absurd to talk about umbrellas because we'd had three or four lovely days, uncle. Storms are sure to come.'

'Snubbed!' exclaimed Uncle Jeff.

'Uncle!'

'Well, I am, Stan—regularly snubbed; and I deserve it, boy. Never mind your umbrella simile; let's have a better one. Suppose we say it's foolish to build a house on the slope of a volcano because the mountain has been quiet for a few years. That's better. Yes, it would be foolish to settle down in the belief of there being peace when that lady of the doves doesn't seem to be indigenous to Chinese soil. We'll see about the torpedoes at once, Stan; but let us moderate our transports, and begin with a couple. They'll be easier to manage, and we might find that we could improve upon them.'

'Yes, that is most likely, uncle,' said Stan. 'Let it be two, then.'

'Take a sheet of paper, and we'll make out a list of the things we want sent out.'

'Yes, uncle,' said the lad eagerly; and he took a big sheet of ruled foolscap, dipped a pen, and sat ready to take down his uncle's words.

But none came, for Uncle Jeff was filling a pipe now and looking thoughtfully before him in silence.

'It seems to me,' he said at last, 'that—— Hullo, Blunt! We're jotting down some notions for our torpedoes.'

'You haven't any ready, I suppose?'

'Ready?' said Uncle Jeff, staring. 'Of course not.'

'Then they'll be of no use to us this time.'

'Is anything the matter, Mr Blunt?' said Stan, whose late experiences had made him ready to take alarm.

'Yes, Lynn; a tea-grower from up-country has come down to warn me that some junks have been prepared, filled with men, and are coming down the river again.'

'A false alarm, perhaps.'

'No; I have too much faith in my informant, one of those with whom I have done most business since I have been here. He tells me that he had a hint that the pirates were on the way again so as to have revenge for their late defeat, and he came across country to warn me.'

'Then we can't be ready for them this time, Stan,' said Uncle Jeff. 'Never mind; put your paper away, and we'll prepare for our visitors. We'll take it out again and finish it when they have gone.'

The evil news was unexpected; there had been no warning giving time for preparation, and upon further inquiry it proved that the enemy were not coming slowly down the river, plundering villages on their way, but were making straight for the *hong*, bent upon revenge.

Every one there felt this, and knowing full well the mercilessness of the foe, all set to work in desperate earnest. There was no time for building up the outwork of chests and bales, but Stan declared that to be of no consequence, for all it did on the last occasion was to delay the enemy for a while, and when they did make a rush it did more harm than good, as it provided shelter for the attacking party, close up to the warehouse, from which they could

assail in security, as well as supplying a platform from which to hurl the stink-pots.

'But it must have been a splendid place from which to fire,' said Uncle Jeff.

'Yes, uncle; but it was horrible when the assault came, and I was in doubt as to whether we could all get in and close up the two doors.'

'Oh yes, let it go,' said Blunt glumly. 'I hated the place. Didn't I get shot down there? Don't speak up for it, Mr Lynn. We can barricade all the lower windows and the doors, and be all shut in here safely before the enemy can land, while all our fighting can be done from the first floor, quite out of reach of their spears.'

'I give up,' said Uncle Jeff; and he worked hard with the rest in securing all the lower windows, and holding planks for the Chinese carpenters to screw up, before wedging up the windows with a lining of tea-chests.

The doors were blocked up as on the previous occasion; water-casks were got on to the upper floor, as well as placed in the lower, and an ample supply of the fire-quenching element brimmed them, as well as every bucket that could be obtained.

There was plenty of time for this, the labour that would have been bestowed upon the outwork being utilised here in strengthening the keep, as Uncle Jeff called it, and making it as secure as it was possible to be.

There was a curious look in Blunt's eyes as he opened the cartridge-boxes and placed a couple of them on tables and chests in the lower floor, as far apart as he could to be handy.

'I haven't forgotten my dreamy fancy about the stink-pots rolling down the stairs, Lynn,' he said. 'If one should come and by any strange accident fire one box, I'm not going to have that set off the rest.'

'But suppose a burning pot did happen to fall into an open chest of cartridges,' said Stan, 'what would happen?'

'I never had the ill-fortune to be by when such an event occurred,' said Blunt rather sarcastically, 'but you may depend upon it something would.'

'Well, I know that,' cried Stan; 'but what? Cartridges wouldn't go off like so much loose powder.'

'Of course not.'

'What I want to know is, would they go off one at a time?'

'There's only one way of knowing for certain, Lynn: stand by and watch.'

'But the cartridges couldn't do much mischief unless one stood opposite to the bullet-ends.'

'I shouldn't like to try, my lad. It seems to me that, according to how the cartridges are packed, one would have to undergo the fusillade of what would seem like so many tiny guns, each loaded with a conical bullet; and I think we shall spare no pains to keep fire away.'

'How are you getting on here?' said Uncle Jeff, coming up, wiping his wet brow.

'Oh, pretty well, sir,' replied Blunt. 'I have been arranging the other cases ready for supplying the men's bandoliers when empty, and your nephew and I have been discussing what would be the consequences if a fire-pot came down into an open case.'

'Never mind discussions now,' said Uncle Jeff. 'I want to know if there's anything more that I can do to strengthen the upper works.'

'I'll come round with you now,' said Blunt.

'Come along, then.—Come too, Stan, my lad.—But let us have a word with the lookout man.'

They passed out through the nearest doorway to hail the watch, which once more proved to be Wing, who this time was keenly on the alert, and ready to announce that the enemy were not yet in sight.

'What a change!' said Uncle Jeff as he paused upon the wharf to look round. The scene was the same as he had gazed upon when seated at the table with Stan making plans; but the river was deserted, every boat being hurried away in panic as soon as the coming danger was known.

The little party turned in again, noting that the planks and chests for screwing up and barricading the door through which they passed were ready for use as soon as the necessity came. The other door had already been closed up, after the last window.

A visit then to the upper floor showed everything in readiness for receiving the attack, and nothing was left but to wait; while, the last shades of evening showing no sign of the approaching enemy, it was concluded that no attack need be expected till morning.

'They are bound to be some hours coming down after being sighted,' said Blunt.

'Of course, with the river winding as it does; but we'll be ready all the same. I say, though, Blunt, is there any possibility of an attack being made from the shore?'

'I don't think so,' was the reply; 'but we'll be prepared all the same, every one sleeping with his arms by his side. But it would mean a tremendous march along dikes and through swampy paddy-fields. No, I do not think it is likely. The enemy are boatmen, and do not care to tramp.'

'Then you can feel safe for some hours,' said Uncle Jeff.

'Yes, quite safe till dawn.'

'Then I vote for every one getting as good a sleep as possible before then, so that we may be in good fighting trim by the morning.'

'Sleep, uncle!' cried Stan. 'Who could possibly sleep at a time like this?'

'I could, and will if I have the chance. I want steady hands for aiming to-morrow.'

'You had better sleep, sir,' said Blunt. 'Lynn here and I will divide the watch between us.'

'No,' said Uncle Jeff; 'I don't mean to be left out in the cold. I shall divide the watch, taking one-third. You're weak, Blunt, so you and Stan go and lie down. In three hours I'll wake Stan, and he shall have his three hours' watch and then come and rouse you. Then you ought to be fresher and stronger. There! no arguing; I'm going to be master over this. You send all the fellows off but two to keep watch with me, and do so at once.'

Uncle Jeff's tones endorsed his words, being masterful in the extreme. Very shortly after the great building was silent as could be, and the only sounds that broke the night were the cries of distant wild birds, the splashings of feeding fish, and the steady tramp of the chief watcher. His big burly

figure loomed up as he walked to and fro along the paved wharf, his two companions preferring to pass their time whispering together, straining their eyes for any dark, shadowy vessel that might come stealing down the river, the subject of their discussion being the desperate fight through which they had gone so short a time before, while they wondered what would have happened by that time the next night.

The three hours passed away, and to the minute Uncle Jeff sent his companions to rouse Stan and the two men who were to take their places.

Three more hours passed, and in turn Stan sent one man to rouse up the two next sentries and went himself to awaken Blunt.

'Yes, Lynn; all right. Hah! I've had such a sleep. What of the night?'

'All calm and still. It's getting misty now, though, and a bit chilly.'

'That means a greatcoat for this poor weak invalid. There! turn in and have another sleep till breakfast-time.'

Stan did not stop to enter into any discussion, but the moment he had seen the manager take his place with his followers he threw himself upon the rough couch so lately vacated, and dropped asleep at once.

The next minute he was awake again, or so it seemed to him, to find Blunt's hand upon his arm.

'Up with you,' he said, 'and help to rouse the rest. Every man is to go to his station without a sound.'

'Are the enemy upon us, then?'

'No,' said Blunt shortly. 'You said it was misty, and that has gone on, till the river is covered by a

white fog so dense that it looks as if you could cut it. You can see nothing half-a-dozen yards away, and I was wondering whether it would disperse when the sun rose, when Wing came close up behind me. "See, misteh?" he whispered, and he pointed down the river into the thick white fog. "No," I said. "What is it?" He pointed again down-stream, and at that moment the mist, which floated like smoke on the surface of the water, lifted a little. Lynn, I felt stunned, for there were six junks in sight.'

'So close?' whispered Stan.

'Yes; and the next minute the mist shut in again and they were gone as silently as they had come.'

'But they had seen the *hong?*'

'No, I think not, or they would have set to and used their sweeps. We must wait now till they begin to come back, unless we are so lucky that they run aground on the other side. Quick! I'm going back to the wharf.'

Stan made no reply, but hurried to where Uncle Jeff was sleeping soundly. He sprang up at a touch.

'Come?' he said sharply.

'Yes. I'm going to rouse up the others. Blunt wants you on the wharf.'

So well had the plans been made that in an incredibly short space of time the whole of the defenders had gathered in silence, to find that the place was completely shut in by the thick white mist, neither warehouse nor river being visible, even those who were two yards distant being quite invisible to their friends.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

'ALL IN TO BEGIN.'

ITH so great a danger at hand not a sound was made, every man, weapon in hand, listening and waiting for the next phase of the pirates' approach; while many a heart that had sunk low in the presence of the peril began to beat less heavily as the minutes glided on, with the veil of mist which hid them from their enemies growing thicker.

'Are we saved?' said Uncle Jeff at last in a whisper. 'I don't want to fight.'

'Nor do I, uncle,' whispered back Stan; 'but it seems to be too good to be true.'

'What are you talking about?' asked Blunt from out of the mist close at hand—'the pirates going by?'

'Yes,' replied Uncle Jeff; 'we've got off, haven't we?'

'Till the fog clears away; and that will not be long. They won't give us up. It's only a question of time and their having to beat up against wind and stream. No,' he added, holding his hand up on high; 'only against stream. I can feel the breeze rising, and that will carry off the fog before long.'

'Then you will not be disappointed of your savage

desires, Stan,' said Uncle Jeff good-humouredly. 'What a fellow you are to fight!'

'Oh! don't try to make jokes now, uncle; it's too horrible.'

'For the enemy, Stan, my lad; and I don't pity them a bit. They have the means in their hands to escape all fighting by leaving us carefully alone; but they will come on these murdering expeditions, to let's give them all the bullets we can.'

'Yes, here comes the breeze,' whispered Stan. 'I can see the mist gliding by.'

'Yes, there it goes,' said Blunt, endorsing the lad's words. 'We shall be clear by sunrise.'

Quite half-an-hour passed before the air was much lighter, and Blunt ventured to give forth the hope that the enemy might have glided on so far down the river that they would be out of sight, when, almost before he had done speaking, the fog seemed to grow thinner, and directly after to turn to a deep orange, golden hue.

'Sun's rising,' said Uncle Jeff. 'I hope the junks are well out of sight. It will give us time for a good breakfast before they come back.'

'No breakfast,' said Stan bitterly, for he was thinking of hot coffee, and his appetite was suddenly damped by what he saw. For the lightening of the mist before the breeze meant that they were close to the edge of the moving bank of rolling mist-clouds, and as if the veil had been suddenly drawn aside, there were the horizontal rays of the sun shining right across the clustering men on the wharf and turning the gray fog-bank to one of gold. To their left the river was hidden, while to their right it was

dazzlingly bright, with only a few golden wreaths floating here and there—a glorious scene, but having one of threatening horror behind; for close inshore, about half a mile down-stream, were the piratical junks with grapnels out, holding on to keep from being carried lower, two on the right bank, and four on the left; and as the crews caught sight of them when the mist glided off they set up a yell of savage exultation, and a busy scene ensued as some began to haul in their grapnels, some to hoist sail, while others thrust the long sweeps overboard, and the watchers saw them dip.

'Humph!' grunted Uncle Jeff in a low voice to his nephew; 'it's a long time since I was at school, Stan, but I am going to give an order that used to be very familiar to me in the old days.'

'What's that, uncle?' said Stan wonderingly.

'All in to begin, my boy.'

'To be sure,' said Blunt grimly. 'All in to begin it is; not that we need hurry, for it will be a full half-hour before they can get up here against the sharp current. We'll have it all in—not to begin fighting, but breakfast. In with you, my lads,' he cried smartly; 'breakfast.'

The defenders gave a cheer, and in less than five minutes the Chinese servants were handing round bread-cake, biscuits, and mugs of coffee to all, while the principals carried theirs out to take on the wharf and watch as well.

In a quarter of an hour Blunt gave orders to the carpenters, and the last open doorway was being closed up, while the men rose from what all felt might be their last meal to take their places for the defence,

the narrow slits at the windows between the closely packed chests and bales looking very ominous, the more so in their desertion, not the barrel of a rifle nor a glittering watchful eye being seen.

'All ready?' said Blunt as soon as he reached the upper floor, after seeing to the last strengthenings being given to the two doors.

A cheer was the answer, and he turned to Uncle Jeff.

'There's plenty of time, sir,' he said. 'Will you say a few encouraging words to the men?'

'I'd rather not,' replied Uncle Jeff. 'I came up here to fight, not talk.'

'But it will encourage them, sir—put heart into them. It does not matter how few words so long as they are to the point.'

'Very well,' said Uncle Jeff, flushing, as he drew in a deep breath and filled out his chest.—'Just a word, my lads, all of you, English and Chinese, for we have to fight like brothers to-day.'

There was a hearty cheer, and Uncle Jeff seemed to be encouraged by this, and spoke out more firmly as he went on.

'There's our duty before us,' he continued, 'to kill or wound as many of these murderous savages as we can, for the sake of being left at peace to earn our livings like men.'

There was another cheer at this, and as it died out Uncle Jeff continued:

'Then all I have to say more to you is this, that we are going to share all dangers with you, and in return we ask you to behave like men.'

That was all, and the echo of the final words

was drowned by a burst of applause and cries of 'We will! We will!'

'Now,' shouted Blunt; 'once more: no random shots. Every cartridge used ought to mean one enemy the less, every miss a mistake. Don't fire, then, till you are sure.—Now then, coolies, you with knife, club, and bar will always be ready to come to the first window to help to beat down the enemy if they try to get in. When not wanted for that, half of you are to be ready to hurl back the stink-pots thrown in, and the others to keep to the buckets and dash out any fire that threatens to take hold. Now then, every man in his place.'

There was a rush, and Uncle Jeff, who was watching the coming junks, cocked his rifle.

It was like a clicking signal for every one to do the same, the sounds running strangely along the stack-encumbered floor.

Then all was silent till Blunt, who was once more taking the lead, his thin, sunken lineaments giving him a fiercely haggard aspect, spoke again.

'Here they come,' he said; 'but no firing until the first men land. Save only for us,' he added in a low voice. 'You, Mr Lynn—you, Lynn junior—will do as I do: keep our best marksmanship for the leaders and the men working and firing the guns.'

A low, growling whisper was the reply, and then all watched the coming ships with their grotesque heads and listened to the buzzing booming of the gongs.

'You gave them a severe lesson last time, Stan,' said Blunt after watching the manœuvres of the enemy for a few minutes, not a swivel-gun nor *jingal*

being fired as the junks were worked up in a double line close alongside of the wharf, where great hooks were thrown ashore, as well as from junk to junk. 'They 're not going to waste time, but are coming on for a big assault all at once.'

'Yes, that 's it,' said Uncle Jeff calmly. 'Well, we must shoot down their leaders, and if the rest come on they 'll have a hard job to get in at any of the windows.'

The gongs kept on their monotonous booming, while the watchers with bated breath noted that the previous losses had made no perceptible difference, the decks of the clumsy vessels being as thronged as ever, while more discipline was visible, parties of men working together under leaders, and with a wonderful absence of confusion.

'They mean mischief, uncle,' said Stan, who found it hard to bear the waiting, his young blood being full of excitement, and he was longing to begin.

'So do we, my boy,' said Uncle Jeff coolly; 'more than they expect. I don't want to brag, but I learnt to be a good shot, and I feel as if I can't miss a man at this short distance. You feel the same, don't you?'

'No, uncle; I feel my hands all of a shake, and as if I should miss every one I shot at.'

'Never mind. Fire away steadily when you begin, boy. As I said before, they are so close that it will not matter; if you miss one man you are sure to hit another.'

'But it does seem so murderous, uncle,' whispered Stan passionately.

'A mistake, boy: not murderous; it 's only justice. We are playing the parts of executioners to criminals.'

'Ah! I thought so,' said Blunt suddenly.

'Thought what?' cried Stan, who felt glad that the discussion was at an end.

'Look at that smoke rising out from the middle of every junk.'

'Stink-pots!' cried Stan excitedly.

'The fire to light them from,' was the reply.

Blunt was right, for in a few minutes scores of wreaths of black smoke were rising out of the little fleet, and as soon as the horrible missiles were well alight the sounding of the gongs stopped for a minute. Then three heavy bangs were given from the nearest boat, and directly after the decks were seen clear of the horrible smoke, and seemed to have suddenly begun to bristle with matchlock barrels, pitchforks, tridents, and spears, while every now and then a gleam of sunlight flashed from some heavy sword-blade.

The scene was weird and strange, for the rapid motion of the crowding crews set the smoke wreathing and floating here and there, while the soft morning breeze wafted the clouds, one minute revealing the deadly preparations, the next hiding all in smoke.

'A grand sight, Stan,' said Uncle Jeff.

'Yes, and such a lovely morning, too,' replied the lad.

'Ah! The more fools the enemy not to go peaceably to work or play, and enjoy it, instead of coming out a-murdering for the sake of a few bales of silk and chests of tea. They will have it, so it's not our fault. I'm in hopes, however, that they'll soon have had enough of it when we give them a taste of what we can do. Hullo! Look out! Here they come.'

'Ah—h!' came like a gasp from Stan's chest as he let the breath he had been holding escape.

For the enemy, in answer to six heavy booms from one gong, were now waiting motionless, as if they had been carefully drilled to perform some special evolution.

Then one loud resounding bang, and there was a yell from every junk.

Crash! went a dozen gongs then, with their beaters toiling furiously, and every junk was full of motion, their occupants pouring over the sides of the three first on to the wharf, while their places were taken by those in the three outer junks lashed to the inner, and a rush was made for the wharf as fast as room was made.

The yelling continued, but there was no firing as yet, all waiting till the whole of the pirate force was on shore ready.

Meanwhile the movements had augmented the thick smoke of the stink-pots, whose contents now began to burn fiercely, sparks and flashes of flame darting through the black fumes.

'Now,' cried Blunt suddenly after literally torturing those he commanded by his reticence; 'leaders only.'

For several showily dressed, red-hatted men began to marshal their forces previous to a general advance, sending the stink-pot bearers to the front, ready for the orders for an advance, which seemed to be imminent.

Blunt's command was given just as the leaders began to wave their swords and the bearers of the barbaric hand-grenades took a step forward; but no

sooner was the order to fire given than three rifles rang out, and three of the leaders went down; while, as directly after a ragged volley came from the warehouse loopholes, down went the other three leaders, in company with several of the stink-pot bearers, and with them all the carefully inculcated discipline. For with a savage yell of fury the whole body of men dashed across the wharf towards the barricaded windows, shaking their weapons, firing at random, and finally making way for the companions who were bearing the fuming earthenware vessels, eager to hurl them in at the first opening they could see.

They rushed on bravely enough, and in a few moments the whole building was resounding and echoing with the casting of the fuming pots, blows from bill-hook, hatchet, and spear, shots from *jingals*, and the shouts of the attacking force.

In reply a steady fire was kept up by the defenders at the most prominent of the attacking party, and Uncle Jeff's remarks had plain illustration, for the enemy were literally so thick that where one was missed another was hit.

But it seemed to make very little difference. The pirates dashed up to the front, and then dividing, went off to right and left, to hurry yelling round to the back, meet there, and then rush back again, keeping up a fierce hacking and beating at door and barricaded window; firing too, and hurling the blazing pots wherever there seemed to be a chance to make one lodge, but always to find the lower openings invulnerable, and the grenades fall back among them in company with deadly shots.

In the midst of the wild excitement in front men

were raised up on their fellows' shoulders to get height before hurling in the pots, or to enable others to reach and make deadly thrusts with their spears through the loopholes.

Vain effort, for the bearers could not reach high enough, and after a few efforts the coolies within served back such of the stink-pots as reached the inside, and returned them on the heads of the spearmen and their bearers, sending the pirates back covered with the blazing material, and yelling with rage and pain, to follow the example set them by others at the former attack and plunge off the wharf into the river.

This assault was kept up for fully ten minutes, the steady resistance sprinkling the level wharf with wounded and dead; but though little impression was made, the enemy, in their fierce fury, seemed to be in nowise rebuffed. They kept on, their voices and gesticulations combining with their savage faces to enforce upon the defenders what must be their fate should they not succeed in beating their foemen back.

The pressure was kept up without effect till the supply of fiery grenades was exhausted, when, utterly baffled by the calm, steady fire, and discouraged by their utter inability to make an impression, the pirates made a sudden rush back to their vessels. In an instant the firing ceased, the defenders gladly accepting the respite to see to such injuries as had been inflicted, and to extinguish the fire at a couple of spots where the blazing resin was gradually creeping up one corner of the building at a place the coolies had been unable to reach it with the water without exposing themselves to the spears of the enemy.

The damage proved to be slight, and the personal injuries trifling in the extreme, merely calling for a little plastering and a bandage, both being dexterously applied by Wing, who seemed quite at home repairing damages, as Uncle Jeff termed it, the injured coming back to their posts quite as a matter of course, ready for the next onslaught if one came.

Stan clung to the hope that the enemy had learned enough and would now go. But he was soon undeceived, for freshly lit pots began to appear amidships of the junks, and as soon as they were blazing well they were raised, and the men came on again. Then the fight raged once more, being kept on for nearly half-an-hour without a sign of yielding on either side, while, fast growing weary, Stan began to look anxiously from one to the other of his two leaders.

It was not till he had glanced at them for the second time that Uncle Jeff caught his eye, and said quietly as he went on loading and firing:

'They're tough, Stan, but they must give up soon, for they are losing men fast.'

'But what about us, uncle?'

'Eh? Oh, we're all right, my lad. Ah! fire at those two mandarin-like fellows who are hounding the men on.'

Their two rifles went off together, and the one Stan fired at stopped short and then staggered back towards the nearest junk, while the other made a dash forward and disappeared round the corner of the building.

'Both badly hit, Stan,' said Uncle Jeff. 'Let us hope that fellow's too much hurt to do any more mischief.'

Their attention was taken off again to another party who were making desperate efforts to force one of the windows, but without effect. At last their success looked likely, for one of the men managed to climb high enough to get a knee on the sill of the opening; and help from his companions coming at the right moment, he raised himself up, spear in hand, and was just about to spring in, while others were following, when thrusts were made with a couple of rifle-barrels and the man's balance was destroyed, making him leap backward to avoid a heavy fall, and being caught by his companions, who were surging about beneath the windows.

An exultant yell told the defenders that the enemy were satisfied that this was nearly an accomplishment of their desires, and encouraged now with the thought that the task was possible, the men came on like a furious wave, literally hurling themselves frantically against the walls and, regardless of life, swarming up at every opening.

'Getting warm,' shouted Uncle Jeff to Blunt. 'Try and keep your men cool; the enemy can't carry this on long.'

'I'm doing my best with them,' said Blunt, shouting to make his voice heard in the frightful din, and having a narrow escape, for one of the flaming pots came full in his face, to be avoided by a sharp wince, and then crashed down on the floor, where a coolie pounced upon it and dashed it flaming back.

'Good, Stan!' shouted Uncle Jeff in his nephew's ear. 'I saw you bring down the fellow who flung that wretched thing. Quick, boy! Fire faster.—

Fire, all of you; they're coming on more and more. How many are there of the wretches?'

'I'm firing as fast as I can, uncle,' cried Stan; 'but I'm afraid that they're doing something round at the back.'

'Then don't be afraid—don't be afraid of anything,' growled Uncle Jeff. 'We don't want imagination to help the real. That's bad enough.—Hah! That has settled you, my bloodthirsty scoundrel!' he growled as he reached out and shot a man down. But a spear came darting up and scratched the side of his face, making him utter an angry snarl, while his eyes lit up with rage as he glared through a loophole at the swarming enemy raging about beneath as if nothing but the defenders' blood would suffice.

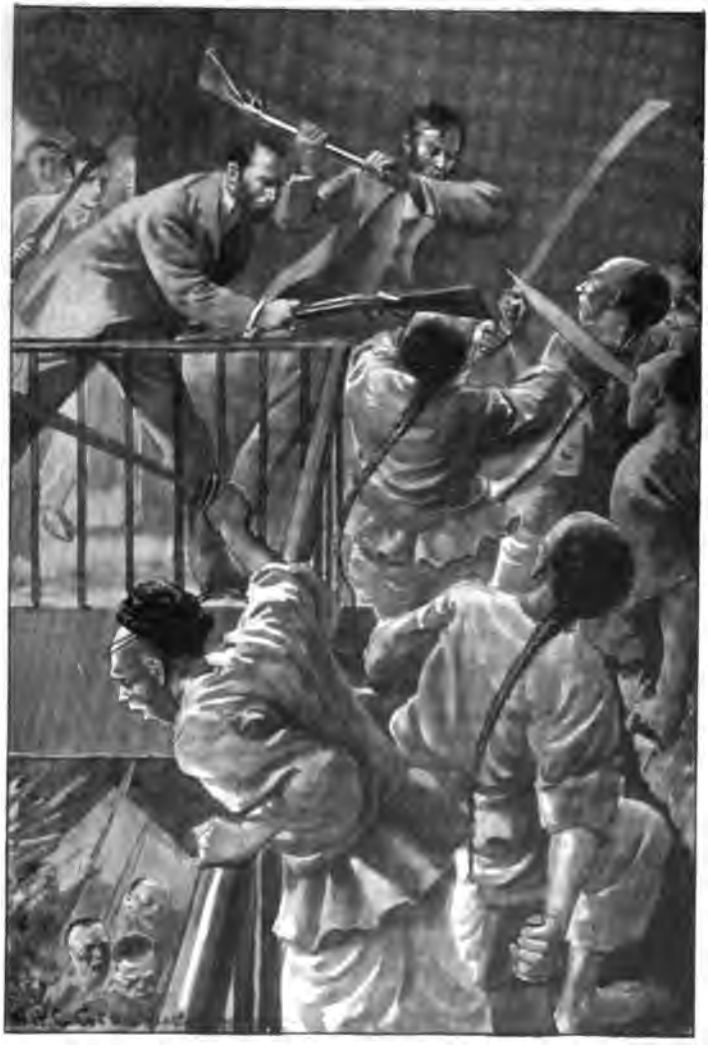
'Not going to be too much for us, are they?' thought Stan, whose blood was well up; but a slight feeling of dread attacked him as to their future. For the enemy seemed, in spite of their losses, by no means quelled, only spurred on to fresh attacks, which grew fiercer as the moments glided by.

'Eh? What?' cried Uncle Jeff suddenly, as a blue-frocked, particularly clean and tidy-looking individual forced his way amongst the powder-and-pitch-smoke blackened party of four defending Stan's window.

'You here, Wing?' cried Stan, turning from taking aim, and feeling a hand grasp his arm.

'Come, quick!' cried the Chinaman, with a highly pitched squeak. 'Pilate got in bottom. Plenty lot come 'long fast; cuttee allee float.'

'Quick, all!' roared Blunt at that moment. 'The stairs—the stairs!'



Just in time to bring his rifle-butt down on the head of a big Chinaman.

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A rush was made towards the opening, and Uncle Jeff sprang to the head of the broad stairs, just in time to bring his rifle-butt down on the head of a big Chinaman who, holding a great sword in both hands, was reaching forward to cut under the arms of Blunt, who was swinging his piece round, clubbed, to beat back three or four of the enemy who were crowding up.

Down came Blunt's rifle, and with it two of the enemy; but half-a-dozen more were springing up ready to receive a tremendous blow from Uncle Jeff —a too tremendous blow, for though it tumbled one man down upon those beneath, the stock of the rifle went after him, and the barrel had to be used as a weapon alone.

Meanwhile Stan had dropped upon one knee, and waiting his opportunity, fired and brought down the next swordsman who reached up to cut at his uncle.

They were desperate moments, but those three held the pirates in check by their efforts till they were reinforced by the coolies who had dealt with the fire-pots, these flinging themselves bravely forward in defence of their masters; and the check grew more severe, giving the defenders time to improve their position.

Stan was the first to make a suggestion, and it was to Wing.

'Bring me a bale here,' he said, 'to fight over.'

'Yes, and let 's have more and more,' cried Uncle Jeff.

Wing showed no signs of his old injury, and as he jabbered fiercely to the coolies, they followed his

example, and in an incredibly short space of time bales and tea-chests were thrust to the edge of the broad opening, forming something of a defence against the attacking party, who were checked but not damped, for three of the defenders of the windows came to Stan's help, firing with him from behind the new breastwork, over which Uncle Jeff raged like an angry lion; while Blunt, whose strength was failing fast, only struck at intervals as opportunities came.

'It 's all over,' thought Stan as he kept on loading and firing mechanically, for it was plain enough that somehow or another the enemy had forced a way into the lower floor, through which they were shouting defiance and fulminating threats; but they made no farther progress, for heads had only to be shown up the stairs for their owners to be beaten down by rifle-barrel or pistol-butt, and their supporters to stumble back or be riddled by one or other of the bullets that were fired with unerring aim.

'Oh deah!' came in a whining voice close to Stan's ear in a momentary pause between two attacks; and turning his head sharply as his fingers were busy with the breech of his piece, there, bent over him, was Wing, with a tremendous knife in his hand. 'Wing wish to be fighting-man. Allee fall downee. Pilate come fastee fastee. Look, look! Going buln evelybody up.'

Wing's eyes and nostrils had been busier than Stan's, for, engrossed as he was with his firing, he had seen nothing but those who were about to attack his uncle, and the greatest peril of all had escaped his notice.

But now it was patent to him that they were

getting to the last of their defence, though still he felt in nowise ready to give up.

'See that, uncle?' he panted.

'Yes, my boy; they're going to make our fall warm for us.'

'But the water-buckets!'

'No good, my lad, unless they can be well applied, and our coolies are helpless to do anything here.'

'Fire!' cried Blunt hoarsely.

'Yes, fire,' said Uncle Jeff; 'but don't slacken your efforts, man. Keep at it, hard; the wretches may get sick after all. If not, I hope they will be caught in their own trap.'

'But us—your nephew—escape?'

'I don't see how,' said Uncle Jeff.—'Do you think you could make a jump from one of the windows and run for it out into one of the rice-fields and hide, Stan?'

'Are you all coming too, uncle?' said the lad.

'No, my boy; it is impossible. We must fight to the last.'

'Yes,' said Stan quietly; 'of course it's impossible. I should only jump into a crowd and be hacked to pieces. I'd rather stay here.'

Uncle Jeff was silent, but he lowered one hand to squeeze his nephew's.

'Bless you, my boy!' he said hoarsely. 'It's very hard, but there's nothing for it unless help comes.'

'And no help will come that I can see,' panted Blunt, who was reeling with weakness.

'Ah—h—h! Takee ca'e!' shrieked Wing, bringing down his big knife with all his might, as, regard-

less of flame and smoke rising with stifling fumes through the square opening of the stairs, some half-dozen of the enemy made a rush to get at the defenders. And once more a desperate struggle ensued, which was repeated till the suffocating wreaths were too much even for the much-diminished attacking party, who now drew back to make way for a strong force of their companions. These rushed to the foot of the stairs to hurl about a dozen of the flaming missiles up at the defenders, and then dashed away again, just in time to escape a furious burst of flame which indicated that the fire was beginning to rage below; in fact, within five minutes the staircase was perfectly impassable, the flames roaring up being augmented with fresh fuel by the enemy, who hurled in pot after pot.

'No escape there, Stan,' said Uncle Jeff as they drew back from the scorching heat.

'But no more attack, uncle,' replied Stan. 'We are safe from that.'

'And safe to be burned out.'

'Yes,' said Blunt bitterly; 'but we can't die like this.—Come, my lads, back to the windows, and let us make the wretches feel that they will have to go on paying for our lives to the last.'

'Yes,' said Uncle Jeff solemnly; 'it has all been bravely done, and so we have done our duty. I suppose we could not make a dash from one window and fight our way to some boat?'

'No,' said Blunt as he shared the old window with them again, the men going back to their former stations—'no; it would be utter madness to try it. Ah! look below.'

'Yes; swarming with their spears,' said Uncle Jeff.

'To catch us as we spring out from the fire,' cried Stan. 'Oh uncle, can we do nothing?'

'Nothing but kill a few more of the wretches before we go, my boy. I should be acting the part of a coward now if I did not own that we have reached the worst.'

'Oh uncle,' cried Stan passionately, 'why did you come?'

'To help you, boy; and I am sorry I've failed. There! shake hands, my dear lad; life is always short, but this is too short for you.'

'Fire! fire!' cried Blunt passionately. 'My rifle's useless, and in another ten minutes we shall be too late.'

Stan looked wildly round as he raised his rifle to fire through the loophole again at the wretches waiting to catch them on bristling trident forks and spears, and it seemed a mockery, though the rifle-shots were fast pattering down, for him to think of destroying still more life when so near the termination of his own; but Blunt was his captain to the last, and his eye was on the sight, his finger on the trigger, and almost by instinct he was marking down one of the wretches right in front. Once more his nerves were tensely strained, and in another instant the enemy before him would have fallen, dangerously wounded if not dead, when there was a sudden shock, as if the fire had reached the little magazine and the cartridges had proved how they would act under the circumstances. The place literally rocked, there was a deafening roar, and the savage yelling of the attacking force was drowned.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

'BUT WE WEREN'T BEATEN.'

TAN looked round, and the man at whom he had aimed escaped.

'What's that?' he shouted as he looked for the crumbling down of the walls.

The answer to his question came in the shrill, piping voice of Wing:

'Um t'inkee gleat Englis' man-o'-wa' come 'long.'

The Chinaman spoke as he rushed away across the wide floor, to begin climbing the narrow ladder on one side—the steps leading to the roof and the trap-door through which he had passed to play the part of lookout.

'Oh, impossible!' cried Uncle Jeff hoarsely.—'Don't believe him, Stan, boy; it's too good to be true.'

Boom! thud! and a sound like a crash, followed by a cessation of the yelling for a perceptible space, and then a peculiar murmuring, with the enemy outside becoming wildly excited, and then as if by one volition swarming for the edge of the wharf.

'Wing's right,' cried Blunt. 'It must be a gun-boat, and they are firing shell.'

'Yes, yes,' shouted Stan, and there was a peculiar

hysterical ring in his voice. 'Look, uncle! that junk to the right is torn open; the poop is smashed. There's the smoke of the shell rising, and——Hurrah! She's going down!'

Stan's triumphant cry was taken up three times over, the defenders crowding the narrow slits to get a glimpse of what was going on—for the first shot had checked the attack, literally paralysing the pirates with astonishment; the second turned the assault into a retreat, while as the fierce hurrahs of the people in the *hong* went on, the gangways of the junks were being crowded in the rush for safety.

'Hoolay! hoolay! hoolay!' came from the ceiling of the great room; while as Stan turned, there was Wing's head visible as he thrust it down, and as soon as he saw that he was observed the Chinaman shouted, 'Big Englis' ship fi'e two-bang shot.'

Boom! came another report, and, almost at the same moment, *crash!*

Another shell had burst just over the second junk close up to the wharf, the splintering of fragments causing terrible havoc, which was trampled out of sight directly by the men crowding aboard.

For the moment Stan forgot all about their own perilous position, for the air rushing in through the barricaded windows was cool and refreshing; but Blunt had had eyes for what was going on below and within, where the air was growing stifling with smoke and heat.

'Here, Lynn,' he shouted. 'Quick! That whistle! Blow, lad, blow!'

The shrill note rang out, and brought every one crowding up to one end of the great stacked-up floor.

'Ah! that's right,' cried Uncle Jeff. 'Nothing to fear from the enemy now, lads; clear this window.'

'Yes; and throw the bales down the staircase. It will block the way,' cried Blunt.

The men cheered, and worked with all their might, bale after bale being tossed into the wide opening and filling it up so that the great draught of heat was checked and the place rendered more bearable as the flame and smoke ceased to rush up as if through some great flue.

This done, Blunt gave a fresh order, and the party began to drop one after another through the window, those behind covering them with their rifles in case of an attack.

But the precaution was needless, for the enemy had but one aim now—to get all on board their vessels, cast them off from the wharf, and make sail.

Hence it was that the defenders reached the outside of the burning *hong* uninterrupted, and while the pirates were busy their intended victims followed the whistle once more, being led by Blunt and Uncle Jeff round to the broken-down window at the back which the enemy had forced.

Here Blunt leapt in, followed by Stan and Uncle Jeff, marshalling his men for that which he had in view—the saving of the great warehouse before it was too late.

Lucky it was that such precautions against fire had been taken and the coolies and warehousemen were so drilled.

For there was only the smoke to fear now. The great casks stood full, and the buckets ready to be

seized and passed along to Uncle Jeff and Lawrence, who, all soiled like the rest, and half-suffocated, sent the water streaming over the parts where the fire was eating its way along the woodwork and up the stairs, till in ten minutes flames and sparks began to give place to smoke and steam to such an extent that it was safe for some of the clerks to assist the carpenters, who, by Blunt's orders, began to tear down the planks over the windows and let in air that could be breathed.

It was none too soon, for even Uncle Jeff of the mighty muscles began to feel that he must crawl out or stifle, while as the first puff of wholesome air rushed in Lawrence dropped, and he was being raised to be carried out into the open air, but began to struggle and make signs that he should be set down. Five minutes later he was vigorously swinging a bucket again.

'Hurrah, Stan!' shouted Uncle Jeff at last. 'There's nothing more to fear.—Do you see, Blunt? A splash here and a splash there. Keep the coolies at it and the mischief will not be so bad after all. Here, I must see what they're doing outside.'

'Me know—I know,' piped Wing, who always seemed to be ready for everything but heavy manual labour such as might break his nails. 'Wing been gone look outside off *hong* whooff. Big ship come all steam up livah. Shoot, shoot topside big junk. Numbee one topside junk go bottom. Numbee two topside junk float down livah go close 'longside. Allee ovey—junk lun 'way up livah. Steamship shoot, shoot, shoot two bang-gun.'

Poor Wing in his excitement suffered to such an

extent from incoherency that his speech was hard to grasp; but helped by a lookout from the wharf, where the enemy was represented only by the dead, the state of affairs was fully grasped. For the masts and parts of the sails of two junks rose from the river a few yards from the wharf-edge; the wreckage of another lying over on its side was floating down-stream, while in response to the fire of a grim-looking gray gunboat, whose shells went through her sides as if they were papier-mâché, a fourth was settling down a couple of hundred yards away, and her late occupants were swimming for the farther bank across the river.

As Stan shaded his eyes, which were dim and painful from the effect of the smoke, he saw enough to prove that the fate of the other junks was sealed. They were sailing up-stream, but the gray gunboat was churning up the water astern as she stole after them like fate, every now and then sending forth a great ball of white smoke with a roar, followed by a stinging crack-like echo when a shell burst with unerring precision, the result being that the river seemed in the distance to be dotted in all directions with strange specks, all of which drifted for the farther shore.

'Ah, Uncle Jeff!' cried Stan suddenly, as he heard a sharp scratch, and turned to see a match burning in the bright sunshine.

'Yes, Stan, Uncle Jeff it is: come out to breathe and have a cigar. I've used up all my stuff, boy. Pumped out. Here we are, you see; safe, though, after all.—My word, how those Jacks can shoot! Did you see?'

'Yes, uncle. Why, that junk must be half a mile away.'

'Yes, splendid practice; but she'll go no farther than to the bottom, and the lads will have a shell into that other directly.'

Uncle Jeff was right. It took two more shells as he sat smoking, and then the last of the six pirate junks was so much bamboo chip floating down the stream.

'Poor wretches!' he said. 'It seems very terrible; but it would have been much worse if the poor warehouse had been smoking ashes now, and our bones beneath.'

'Yes,' said Stan, shuddering. 'I say, uncle, this is a horrible place.—Ah, Wing! You there?'

'Yes; come see you like cup tea.'

'What! can you get some?' cried Stan.

'Yes, plenty tea. Wateh nea'ly boil.'

'Oh! I should,' cried Stan huskily, 'for I feel quite sick at heart.'

There were a few rifle-shots fired at fugitives on the banks, but the object of the gunboat's crew was more to scatter the savage miscreants than to add to their destruction; for the commander on board was satisfied with the blow at the pirates' power, and he said so half-an-hour later, when his vessel had steamed back and was moored to the wharf.

He had landed to inspect the place and congratulate its defenders warmly.

'As brave a defence as I know of, gentlemen,' he said. 'And it seems to me that I only just came up in time.'

'Only just,' said Uncle Jeff; 'but we weren't beaten.'

'Beaten—no!' said the officer sharply. 'You'd have kept the miserable brutes off, but I'm afraid that the fire would have been rather too much—eh?'

'Yes,' said Uncle Jeff; 'we should have had to strike our colours to that. But there! don't talk about it. We've had an awful escape.'

'You have, and no mistake. Here! come on board and have a wash while something to eat is made ready.'

'A wash!' cried Stan. 'Oh yes.—I say, uncle, you look awful.'

'Do I, my boy? Humph!—I say, captain, do you carry a pocket-mirror?'

'No; but there's a looking-glass or two in the cabins. Do you want to shave?'

'What! cut off my growing beard?' said Uncle Jeff fiercely. 'No, nor my head either. I wanted my nephew to see his face.'

'My face?' cried Stan, colouring invisibly—that is to say, the red was hidden by the black. 'Is it very bad?'

He glanced at Blunt as he spoke.

'Well,' was the reply, 'did you ever see a sweep?'

The hospitality on board the gunboat embraced the attentions of a doctor as well as refreshments, and he had a busy hour with cuts and burns before the night closed in, with sailors to keep the watch over those who slept the sleep of utter exhaustion; though ward was needless, for the remnants of the piratical gang were scattered far and wide, completely crushed.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

'SUPPOSE WE LEAVE THEM THERE.'

A MONTH later the people at the *hong* had repaired all damages, and paint and varnish had hidden unpleasantly suggestive marks; while in two months the loss was almost forgotten in the increase of trade consequent upon the peace existing in the district, maintained by an occasional visit of the gunboat upon the station, ready always to quench every piratical spark that appeared.

At first Stan had declared that he should never be able to feel settled up the river; but he did, for there was always something animated and new about the station to which the peaceful traders flocked, knowing as they did that all transactions with the English merchants meant perfect faith and nothing akin to dealings with the squeezing mandarins. In fact, the lad began to think that his busy life to and fro was, after all, one of the most happy, and that he might pick out his father and uncle as fine specimens of what English merchants might be.

'I begin to think, Uncle Jeff,' he said one day, 'that a young fellow might do worse than become a merchant out here.'

'Well, yes,' said Uncle Jeff, with a smile; 'he might—yes, certainly he might.'

It was one evening when Uncle Jeff, Blunt, and Stan were talking over the old trouble of the past—that is to say, about the traitor in the camp.

'Well, for my part,' said Uncle Jeff, 'I give all my votes—plumpers—for poor old Wing. He never tried to destroy the ammunition. He's true as steel.'

'I second that,' said Blunt.—'Now, Lynn, what do you say?'

'That it's cruel to the poor fellow even to think of such a thing. I'd trust him anywhere.'

'Same here,' said Uncle Jeff.

'Same here,' said Blunt. 'It must have been one of those fellows who had charge of the water-casks, but which we shall never know, for they will not split upon one another. Anyhow, they've fought well for us, and the only thing to be done is to let the matter drop.'

'As far as we can,' said Uncle Jeff very gravely. 'It's a serious thing, though.'

'Very,' replied Blunt; 'and I've dwelt upon it time after time, till my head has been all in a whirl. You see, it was just when I was at my worst, and I can remember in my half-delirious state being in a terrible fright lest one of those stink-pots should come in, roll down the stairs, and then go bounding down and reach the magazine. It was like a nightmare to me.—And you remember, Stan, that, bad though I was, I sent Wing up to tell you of the need for being careful.'

'Oh yes, I remember,' said Stan.

'And even then I didn't feel at rest,' continued Blunt, talking quickly, and seeming as if every incident connected with the first attack had come vividly back to his mind. 'It was horrible, and what with the torture of my wound and that caused by anxiety lest any accident should happen to the powder, I felt as if I didn't know what I was about. Now it was the wound, and now it was my head, and altogether it was like a terrible dream, all worry and bewildering excitement, till the pain and feverishness of my hurt were as nothing to the agony and dread lest the place should be blown up. It was then that I felt that something more must be done or the place would go, and I sent Wing to warn you, Lynn.'

'Yes; of course. I thought that you must be in a great state of fidget—and no wonder.'

'Fidget doesn't express it, Lynn. I was—— Bless me! How strange! How'——

Blunt stopped short, looking in a bewildered way from one to the other, and ending by clapping his hand to his forehead and holding it there.

'What's the matter, Blunt?' said Uncle Jeff quietly.

'Nothing—nothing—only it seems so strange—so queer. My head—my head!'

'Lie back in that chair.—Stan, fill a glass with water.'

'No, no; nonsense!' cried Blunt impatiently. 'I'm all right now, only it's my head. So strange!'

'Yes; you've been talking a little too much. You see, you are still weak.'

'Rubbish!' cried Blunt angrily. 'You don't

understand. It's my head. Something seems to have broken or fallen there so that I can see quite clearly.'

'Drink that water,' said Uncle Jeff sternly; and in obedience to the command the manager took the glass Stan handed to him, drained it, and set it down.

'Refreshing?'

'Yes, very.—But how strange!'

'Is it?' said Uncle Jeff quietly.

'Yes. It's almost awful,' said Blunt excitedly. 'Only a little while ago.'

'Here, I say, hadn't you better leave off talking?' said Uncle Jeff gruffly.

'Lie down on the mats for a few minutes,' said Stan. 'I'll roll one up for a pillow.'

'Absurd!' cried Blunt. 'You two are fancying that I am ill, when something that has been clogging my brain has broken or been swept away—I can't tell which; I only know that I'm quite well again once more, and see everything clearly in connection with that business. I remember—— Yes: that's it.'

Stan glanced at Uncle Jeff, who frowned and looked puzzled as to what was best to be done. In his eyes the manager was going quite off his head.

For Blunt had begun to pace the office rapidly, and went on muttering to himself as he gazed straight before him, ending by stopping short at the office table and bringing one hand down with a heavy bang which made the ink leap in the stand.

'Have another glass of water,' said Uncle Jeff; and Stan started to get it, but stopped short.

'Don't run away, Lynn,' cried Blunt. 'This is interesting. How some doctors would like to know! It has all come back now, but I must have been off my head or I shouldn't have acted so, of course. Half-an-hour ago I didn't know I had done it, but I do know now. Talking about the matter seems to have cleared away the last of the mental cobwebs that have been worrying me.'

'Yes, yes, yes,' said Uncle Jeff impatiently; 'but you really had better have a nap.'

Blunt smiled as he looked at the speaker.

'You think I 'm a little queer still,' he said.

'Oh no,' replied Uncle Jeff; 'only tired and over-excited.'

'Not a bit,' replied Blunt. 'I 'm all right, I tell you, and I can see clearly now how that trouble came about the cartridges being wet.'

'Indeed!' said Uncle Jeff. 'Well, how did it come about?'

'I drowned them with water, of course.'

'You did?' said Stan, staring. 'Nonsense!'

'Yes, nonsense!' said Uncle Jeff. 'You wouldn't have done such a thing as that!'

'If I had been in my senses—no. But I was not. I was wildly excited and delirious from my wound, and there was that idea pressing upon me that one of the stink-pots would roll down blazing from the upper floor and explode the cartridges. It was while I was more sane that I sent Wing to you, Lynn, with that message, but as soon as he had gone the trouble increased. I felt that he would not get there in time, and I got up and went round to the back of the warehouse, picked up one of the

buckets of water, and while the men in charge of the casks were on the stairs watching you and the others keeping up the firing, I poured the water into the last case of cartridges, chuckling to myself at my cleverness, and saying that there was no fear now.'

'You laughed and said that?' cried Stan sceptically.

'I did. I remember it perfectly now, even to my feeling of satisfaction at having saved the place from all risk of destruction in that way. Yes, and I can remember lying down again and shutting my eyes because I heard Wing coming. Yes, there it all is, as plain as if I were looking at myself now. I can remember, too, the feeling of rest and content that came, and with it the return of the throbbing pain, till I fainted or fell asleep, to wake with my mind quite blank, knowing nothing whatever of my acts, and being ready to join in accusing poor old Wing. But there! it was the act of a man quite off his head, doing about as double-edged an act as was ever committed. Queer—eh, Lynn?'

'Queer? Well, I don't know what to call it,' said Stan, 'but I hope you'll never do such a thing again.'

'I promise you I will not so long as I escape being shot through the shoulder,' said Blunt, smiling; 'but if I am wounded like that I will not answer for the consequences.'

Suppose we leave them there.

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